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CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

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THROUGH THE BIBLE

EXPOSITORY AND DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTS

BY

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IN FOUR VOLUMES

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Let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.

IN calling the people to hearken to his message of coming judgment and everlasting mercy, Micah appeals to memory and conscience. He bases his appeal for repentance upon the fact of God's unvarying goodness toward His people. His first and final argument is, that despite the idolatry into which Israel had lapsed God's beneficence has never varied. The people have found no untrustworthiness in Him. They are utterly without excuse in regard to their wilful wandering ; for not one thing has failed them of all that He promised to their fathers. And the objective witness of these facts is confirmed by the subjective witness of their own hearts. Hence the prophet's appeal on the ground of the reasonableness of God's coming judgment is unanswered because it is unanswerable.

Against the bright background of the Divine righteousness human sin looks its blackest. God's goodness is always the strongest condemnation of our transgression. For the most sinister aspect of wilful sin is that of ingratitude toward Him Who lavishes His gifts upon men and gives His best to the least worthy. Love is never so cruelly wounded as in the house of its friends ; and when we repay Heaven's tender mercies with indifference and contumacy we crucify the Son of God afresh. For it is in Him that all the goodness of God toward us meets. By Him the eternal riches are unlocked to us. And His witness against us, or for us, confirms our own choice and destiny.

O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?

ONE of the evils with which Micah charges Israel is the prevalence of social injustice. The rich oppressed the poor, and the powerful alienated the possessions of the weak, in defiance of the law of God. Systematic land-grabbing, tolerated by those in authority, had changed the whole character of social life and had opened the door to all manner of evil practices. Not only because of this perverted relationship between man and man, but because of the contempt of the Divine law which it expressed, did Micah declare God's indignation. The people, and especially those in high places, acted as though the Spirit of the Lord took no notice of their doings; as though His vigilance was confined to essentially religious spheres; and as though His precepts might be disregarded with impunity. It must be brought home to them that He is not straitened, and that the measure of their offence is the justification of those things that are to come upon them.

We all need to be reminded often of the unsleeping watchfulness of the Lord. For the remembrance that He sees us, and that the moral quality of our hidden things, as of our open actions, is unerringly read, is at once a deterrent and an inspiration. We cannot pursue a course in defiance of His declared Will if we realize His eye upon us. Nor, on the other hand, can we fail to carry out His commands if we know that He is at hand. The fact of the Divine omnipresence is one of the strongest safeguards of the Christian life.

The sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

THE most sinister feature of Israel's transgression, against which Micah was commissioned to testify, was the moral state of the religious teachers of his day. These were men who spoke in the name of the Lord, but without His authority. They caused the people to err from His ways by accommodating counsel to weakness, and by sanctions which had no moral basis. The severe condemnation which the conduct of these prophets meets, is evidence of the enormity of sin which involves the deterioration of other lives. Obviously beginning as good men, by their time-serving methods they had forfeited all right to speak in God's name, and had lost every qualification for their office. For Micah declares that they shall not have a vision, that they shall walk in darkness and not in light, and—severest penalty of all—when they pray they shall have no answer from God. The fact is, men whose object is to make personal gain out of the service of the Lord become themselves victims of their own courses. Their punishment is the sentence of death within themselves.

Since all the Lord's people are called to be His witnesses, it behoves us to lay to heart this example of unfaithfulness. Entrusted with the Word of the Lord, not only as declared in written record but as interpreted and enriched also by personal experience, we must fulfil our commission or forfeit our enduements. The outcome of degeneration is further degeneration. From the unfaithful servant is taken away the capacity he misuses.

Now why dost thou cry out aloud? Is there no king in thee? Is thy counsellor perished?

AS the complement, but by no means the contradiction of his message of warning, Micah declares the mercy of God. The nation which has so terribly failed of His purpose shall yet be renewed. Her forfeited influence shall be restored, and to her bright witness of God and His truth all nations shall come. Days of war shall give place to years of peace, and energies which have been employed destructively shall become instruments of progress and blessing, when Israel once again becomes the favoured of the Lord. Such a picture as the prophet paints of the coming golden age might well stagger the boldest faith, seeing that the state of the land was what it was, with impending judgment so certain and so severe. It is to rally those who could not believe such an age should yet dawn for them that the prophet flings out this challenge. Why should they fear if God, their true King, is still in their midst? Why should they doubt if He, Whose counsels of old have been mercy and truth, still abides with them?

It is this recognition of the presence of God which converts almost inconceivable possibilities into indubitable realities. If He is with His people, then nothing within the limits of His Will is impossible to them. How often we fail to bear in mind this fundamental fact of the Christian life and its corollary of obedient co-operation with Him! "Lo, I am with you always" is covenanted certainty of power for every service, of guidance in every perplexity, and of victory in every conflict.

And this man shall be the peace.

IT is abundantly clear that this prophecy has more than an immediate and local interpretation. In all likelihood Micah was speaking greater things than he himself knew. For it has only been fulfilled in the Messiah Who brought to Israel, as to all the nations, the blessings promised from earliest ages. All the immediate events with which prophet and people were concerned were preparatory to His coming; and what was foretold both of judgment and restoration had infinitely larger meaning than the present could compass. For life is not bounded by any material limits, nor does God fulfil Himself by anything less than eternal gifts. Thus it is that the peace which the prophet declared was something immeasurably greater than mere concord between the nations. It stood for heart harmony with the Will of God, into which only Christ could, in the fulness of time lead Israel and alien alike.

That "He is our peace" is the central declaration of the Gospel. It is the interpretation of His redemptive life and death upon which faith is content to rest, being rewarded by an experience of union with God which becomes an energetic inspiration of holiness and service. How often, when human frailty fails to accord with the Divine command, and our best desires are overborne by our worst tendencies, has this word brought assurance to our troubled hearts. For how firm a foundation have we in His faithful word, and how powerful an ally in His unfinished purpose!

O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee?

IT is surely a bold flight in which Micah sets forth a dialogue between God and Israel, wherein He pleads for their love and trust on the ground of all that He has been toward His people from the beginning. Like his contemporary Isaiah, the prophet conceives God as desirous of reasoning together with His people in order to convince them of the righteousness and strength of His claims upon their life. But in each case it would seem to be without response from a people whose faculties had become impaired by sin, so that they could neither hear God's voice nor answer His overtures. How strange is it that God should put Himself in the place of a suppliant, laying Himself open to rebuke and rebuff on the part of those He seeks to bless! Great indeed is the measure of His love.

Well might we conclude that our ways have wearied God, and that our ungracious treatment of His kindness has alienated Him from us. Yet it is He Who takes the place of the offender, humbling Himself in seeking to win our hearts. Does not such condescension convict us of unworthiness and hardness? What are we that He should be at such pains to bless us? Surely Divine love can go no further than this; and surely we cannot attempt to justify ourselves in its presence. To His heart-searching challenge conscience can only make the reply of a broken and contrite heart. Blessed be His Name, He does not despise such!

A man's enemies are the men of his own house.

MICAH is here declaring a truth which, by reason of its quotation by Christ, has become part of His interpretation of the Gospel. The purpose of discipleship, formed in individual hearts by experience of His saving grace, is always a divisive influence. It sets men at variance, though not necessarily at hostility, with the prevalent trend and direction of the world's life. Just as Christ Himself was a singular Figure in the life of His day, so those who are indwelt by His Spirit and controlled by His law are thereby separated from the life of our own day. Sometimes their testimony evokes undisguised opposition, and sometimes the dissuasion of affection. This latter is the hardest of all things to resist; and many an one, who has not quailed before the avowed enemies of the Cross, has capitulated when human love has voiced the specious suggestions of desertion.

Part of Christ's eternal attraction is the frankness with which He discloses the issues of faith. He never makes the way appear easier than it actually is in order to gain adherence to His cause. He dissuades us from all rash and ill-considered discipleship, and never disguises the certainty or strength of the conflict. And He interprets even the softest influences which seek to weaken the determination of faith and loyalty—even those which have their rise in the tender sanctities of heart and home—as part of the scheme of him who masquerades as an angel of light for the seduction of the people of light. Being thus forewarned we are forearmed.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble

THIS word is both experience and prophecy. Prophet and people alike have long been blessed by the goodness of the Lord. The nation's history is inextricably bound up with the story of His purpose and care; and though now the moral state of the people is such that His love must take unkindly forms for their discipline, He has not changed. His mercy is still over all His works, and His character is the firm foundation upon which His people may at all times build. Their impenitence, however, and their lack of response to those intimations of His Will which have already come to them in calamity and suffering, have made certain their sorer punishment. Darker days are yet to dawn upon them. They are to be involved in a conflict of nations in which it will seem that their national life is entirely destroyed. Nothing that they have ever experienced is comparable to the evils that will come upon them; but, through all, the goodness of God will remain unchanged. The future shall but repeat the past to those who seek Him. Thus does the prophet encourage the faithful few in the land by guiding their thoughts to the well-spring of all their life.

Whatever be its second causes the people of God are never immune from trouble. But they are free from fear and despair. For come what may, God is unchanged, and the refuge of His love is always open to them. When faith is tested, and life for the time is darkened by things hard to bear and to understand, in Him is ever to be found strength and light for the reinforcement of our confidence. How foolish we are when we attempt to live through the evil day without His aid!

Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.

THE chief burden of Nahum's message concerns Nineveh. The life of that nation had been closely bound with the life of Israel; and at times Nineveh had even been God's instrument for correction of His people. Arrogance, pride, and cruelty, however, had gone far beyond His permissive Will; and now at length He is about to rise up and utterly destroy the nation which has done despite to His law and has wickedly oppressed His people. Nineveh has long been set against them. Now God is set against her; and nothing could be more awesome than the description of the coming judgment in which that proud race is to be humbled and destroyed.

How tragic is the unconsciousness which determines destiny! Nineveh, doubtless, had little idea of the far-reaching consequence of her attitude toward Israel's God when she gratified her own passion at their expense. But with nations and men alike trivial things are apt to assume tremendous importance, and to carry their perpetrators far beyond the point of self-recovery. It is a forlorn hope which fights against God when He contests the righteousness of any course. And it is the very depth of folly which prefers to have Him as an enemy rather than as a master. For when He is against those who reject Him their end is inevitable. The plain issue which is set before every man, recorded in His Word and confirmed in Christ His Son, is between life and death, blessing and cursing.

Upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

THE greatest of Nineveh's transgression is the influence she has had upon other peoples. Her multiplied commercial correspondences with surrounding nations, as well as her military prowess, have inevitably impressed her standards and mode of life upon them. Nineveh has in fact become a fountain of evil whose waters have poisoned many. And her punishment now declared by Nahum, and soon to be carried out, is a striking warning against the sin of causing others to sin. It writes in vivid character the lesson which men in every age are slow to learn—that none "liveth unto himself"; and brings every purpose and action of life into direct relationship with God's control of things.

How solemnly Christ taught this same lesson to individuals which the prophet here proclaims to a nation. For He warned men of the fate which must overtake those who put any cause of stumbling before others. No words of His are so terrible in their revelation of that which must befall them who cause His little ones to offend as those in which He declares: "It were better for that man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the depth of the sea." With what seriousness does He thus invest life for us all! For even to-day we are making it easier or harder for those who come into contact with us to come also into contact with Him.

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation.

IN answer to the musings of the prophet Habakkuk on the moral state of Israel, God reveals to him not only His purpose of judgment but the method by which it will be carried out. A Chaldean invasion is to take place in which Israel will suffer unspeakable calamity, and in which it will appear as though the people of God have fallen victim to heathen foes. In reality, however, it is of their own sin that they are victims. The Chaldeans are merely God's agents by whom the wages of sin are to be paid. Behind all the military strength and native rapacity under which Israel will be broken, is His controlling Will. Even these unlikely instruments are raised up for His purpose by His power.

The word which heartened the prophet may well hearten us also, who are often strangely perplexed at life's second causes. There are times when we cannot understand why devastating experiences should invade our serenity and destroy our peace. We wonder why it is that things come upon us which break our powers of resistance and humble us before God and men. But we must look beyond second causes for their interpretation. It is God Who still raises up the Chaldeans. The inspiration of their pressure upon us is the "Will that willeth good alone." And we do well when we look beyond things seen and felt to Him Whose methods may sometimes be obscure, but Whose meaning is always plain.

I will stand upon my watch . . . and will watch to see what he will say unto me.

THAT the prophet should be puzzled by God's choice of such a nation as the Chaldeans for the punishment of His people is hardly to be wondered at. He knew well their character and how far from according with the ways of God were their ways. Not wanting to make any mistake in his proclamation of warning to Israel, his bewilderment emboldened him to challenge God in the matter. But he is content to wait for the answer to his queries; for his confidence in God is established. He has learned for himself that His ways are often as slow as they are certain; and he is resolved that no impatience on his part shall impair the accuracy of his message. Hence his resolve to stand as a watchman, waiting until God should interpret His counsel, and ready to discern the first movement in the direction of its fulfilment.

If we took more time to wait upon God in regard to the things which vex and trouble our minds we should make fewer mistakes about His ways than, alas, we do. It is the temptation of us all to come to too rapid conclusion about the things of which we have only seen the beginnings in His Word. And herein we embarrass His work. It is always harder to exercise patience than to exert energy. The task of tarrying makes far heavier demand than that of toiling. But it is entirely essential that every one who would be a messenger of God, and a co-worker with Him in the world, must himself get to know Him. A forsaken watch-tower results in a fruitless life.

Although . . . yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

HAVING seen what great devastation is to come upon the land in punishment of sin, and being made aware of the tribulation through which his nation must pass, Habakkuk might have been excused an air of gloom and a note of pessimism. For, after all, was not this an overwhelming evidence of the failure of the ministry of those who, like himself, had preached righteousness and declared the Law of the Lord? Yet there is nothing of the kind found in him. His prophecy ends on the high note of faith's gladness. He is prepared to look out upon fields without harvest, upon labour brought to nothing, upon every possession and resource destroyed, with unimpaired confidence in God. He knows that richer far than earthly prosperity are His judgments, and firmer than all material good is His favour.

Only the man who dwells deep in the love of God can rejoice in Him when things all seem to go wrong. It takes courage of a high order to sing the Lord's song in a strange land where everything challenges faith with an unanswerable question. Yet they who have learned that behind the inexplicable things of loss and failure there moves a perfect love, fulfilling itself in perfect wisdom, can ever sing their songs of rejoicing. For Christ has made them children of eternity, to whom the things that cannot be moved are realities. And what a testimony in a world of universal sorrow is their anthem of rejoicing in Him Who is their "exceeding great reward."

Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord.

LIKE the other prophets of his day, Zephaniah must utter words of warning and woe. His testimony and theirs are complementary, each confirming the other in general outline at least, though differing in detailed description. Sin against God, the certainty of its punishment, the unchangeableness of His mercy, and the call of His love, are the great certainties on which he discourses. But these things have not come to him in constraining force, nor become in him a passionate energy, apart from struggle and self-conquest. In the secret place he has had his own controversies with God in regard to the seeming contradiction between His declaration and His character. As every prophet must, he has faced the moral difficulty of his mission, and has learned that it is only the faith of the messenger which can call forth faith in the hearers. God has told him to hold his peace in His presence. And having mastered the lesson he is able to teach it to Israel.

Every man who has to speak for God to his fellows must first learn in himself to be silent beford Him. For the message is always greater than the prophet can understand. We are, in fact, put in trust with a Gospel we cannot measure, embracing mysteries we cannot fathom, and holding blessings we can never ourselves fully apprehend. Hence the necessity of learning the submission of true faith as the necessary preparation for carrying out its mission. In such a service, "greater is he that keepeth his own spirit than he that taketh a city."

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly.

LIKE his contemporaries Zephaniah has a wide sweep of vision, embracing not only Israel but the other nations who have from time to time been brought into connexion with Israel, and hence into contact with Israel's God. The standards applied to them are not, in the nature of the case, the same as those by which Israel is judged; for their light is considerably different in degree. Yet the nature of their offence, and the certainty of the retribution which shall overtake them is always made plain. In this instance, Ethiopia is indicted for the comprehensive fault of dwelling carelessly. Her peoples have been indifferent to the laws of God. They have exalted themselves in their pride as though He were not over all. Sooner or later Nemesis must overtake the nation which flouts His commandment.

The seriousness of life is written large in the Word of God for those who can read. Day by day we are dealing with things altogether greater than our powers of conception or control, choices whose issues are infinite, relationships whose influences are eternal, and activities which have direct bearing upon ultimate destiny. Hence the necessity of living seriously, which means prayerfully and humbly. Carelessness in regard to even the smallest details should find no place in the life of the true believer. Christian discipleship means scrupulous loyalty to the law of God, at whatever cost, in every sphere of interest and duty. How plainly is this set forth for our learning in Christ's earthly life. To Him nothing was trivial nor unimportant. And only by walking "even as He walked" can we please God.

The unjust knoweth no shame.

THE nature and strength of sin is seen in what it accomplishes in human life. Its future punishment is not difficult to deduce from its present destructiveness. Thus Zephaniah declares the certain destiny of his people. For despite all God's correction, and in defiance of all His mercy, Israel has failed to approximate in any measure to His character, which is ever the standard of the life of His servants. Every ministry of His providence has been directed to impressing their mind and inspiring their energy to this end. But all has been in vain; for Israel remains self-satisfied and proud. She is, moreover, entirely impenitent; and it would seem as though she had lost the power to feel shame. It is the deadliness of sin that it works thus in human lives, confusing the standards of good and evil and perverting every true instinct.

In every life there are moral issues in which the hot breath of shame is a final argument, the ultimate protest of conscience, and the most powerful impulse of righteous choice. It is, indeed, part of the prevenient grace of God that we are thus warned of evil which is always greater in fact than in appearance. But sin wilfully persisted in plays havoc with conscience. Thus it is that we lose the protective power of shame in regard to evil, while, strangely enough, at the same time we acquire a false shame in regard to the confession of relationship with God. Should not sin's power to destroy the finest sensibilities of the soul, and to derange its truest consciousness, warn us against playing with its deadliness? For none can do so with impunity.

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

HAGGAI, one of the prophets of the restoration, is moved to protest against the supineness of the people in regard to the rebuilding of the Temple. It had been their first care, on returning from exile to their own land; and for a while the work had gone on apace. When monotony and drudgery, however, succeeded novelty, the early inspiration faded, and the people succumbed to the temptation of looking after their own affairs and of securing their own comfort. Thus every man built his own house, while God's House was left in an unfinished state. Meanwhile, God was seeking to bring them back to Himself by disorganizing their prosperity. Their crops failed, their commercial affairs went wrong; and a spirit of dissatisfaction settled upon them. It was to interpret this state of things that Haggai was commissioned, in order to encourage them to practical repentance and reform.

The building of God's House, in its largest spiritual meanings, is the first duty of His people. We have been delivered from the hands of our enemies that we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness. And yet how common is Israel's sin in our midst! The temptation to establish our own prosperity is as seductive as it is constant. And only he who keeps steadily before him the purpose for which he has been redeemed is saved from disproportioned expenditure of every sort of resource, which is, in its last analysis, sheer robbery of God.

Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.

AWAKENED to a sense of shortcoming by the prophet's rebuke and challenge, the people are prepared for his ministry of encouragement. Having secured their sympathy and evoked their determination to resume their forsaken task, Haggai assures them by declaring God's goodwill. It might well be that He had withdrawn His presence from them in resentment. For had they not served themselves by deserting His interests? Such, however, is the long-suffering nature of His love that it makes great allowance for human frailty and invests the heart's deepest intention with fullest value. He may be grieved at the carelessness of His people, but He has not gone from them. He waits to co-operate with their energy and to multiply their service. He is ready to accept their discredited profession of allegiance and to renew their privilege of being His co-workers.

No inspiration is comparable with that of the assured presence and favour of the Lord. Once we are certain of this we can forget the things that are behind—since He has forgotten them—and can face the difficulties of His work without fear. It is the consciousness of sinful failure which paralyses heart and hand in His service. We cannot build His Temple if we are conscious of some disloyalty which has never been confessed and cleansed. When this is dealt with, however, we can, like Israel, set about the service of the Kingdom with new purpose. The pure in heart see God; and herein is their strength for adding their quota to a work which, like the building of the Temple of old, has an influence upon the ends of the earth.

Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.

WHILE Haggai exhorted the people to build the temple, Zechariah, in a series of visions, urged upon them the supreme importance of a right attitude of heart toward God. Other prophets in former days have testified to their fathers, upon whom came the punishment of sin or the promised blessing of God according to their response. Their example ought to have been sufficient to keep Israel from wandering off into evil ways. But they have paid no heed to it. Beguiled by promise of material affluence and well-being they have turned their backs upon God, and have bartered His favour for things that have not profited. For nothing can satisfy those who have once known His love. There is in them a deep instinct of heart which is in unspoken alliance with the prophet's message.

The difficulty with most men who have turned from God, whether deliberately or by a long process of unwitting indifference, is not as to their need of turning to Him. They know how arid is the desert and how unsatisfying the husks. They realize how unworthy they are to be called His sons. But they feel in themselves a moral disability. They simply cannot find the power to retrace their steps. Fear of another failure, distrust of self, and fluctuation of desire, terrify them into inaction and keep them fast bound in misery and iron. Yet all they need is to turn toward Him. There is life indeed in the look of self-despair toward the God of all grace.

Behold a man with a measuring line in his hand.

THE exactitude of God's care is declared by Zechariah's vision of the measuring of Jerusalem. All the vicissitudes which are yet to come upon its inhabitants are in no sense a contradiction of His earlier purpose. Although she has proved unfaithful and unworthy, and has needed sharp and stern discipline, His Will is victorious and must ultimately prevail. It may seem at times as though, in the crash and welter of warfare and sorrow, His people are destroyed and His purpose concerning them broken off. As a fact, however, His care is never so real and never so close as when they need it most. The man with the measuring line expresses the completeness of His knowledge of their state, as of their shortcoming.

It is ever God's way to bring home to our hearts the certainties of His love by comparison of the actual with the ideal. The man with the measuring line not only noted the dimensions of the city. He knew also what they ought to have been. Whatever discrepancy may have existed in material measurement it is certain that the material is merely figurative, and that moral and spiritual measurement is the real objective. For there is a standard measure for life. God's Will has been fully and finally declared in "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." His people are to walk as He walked, to be in the world as He was, and in all things are to fashion themselves after the pattern of His most holy life. He holds for us the measuring line of truth; and it is part of faith's exercise daily to submit to His scrutiny that we may be daily conformed to His likeness.

If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts.

THE vision of Joshua the high priest, his cleansing, clothing, consecration, and charge, is set forth in illustration of the principle upon which God's work is committed to, and may be carried out by, men. Having their human unfitness and disability dealt with by Divine power, and their enduement covenanted by Divine faithfulness, they are commissioned in terms which bind them to personal faithfulness and loyalty. They must themselves walk in the ways of God if they are to judge His people. They must in their own lives keep His charge if they are to keep His courts as ministers of His Word. It is in these respects that the religious teachers of Israel have failed; and their failure is attested in the present state of the nation. Hence it is in them that revival must begin. And it must begin in this way.

Since all believers in Christ are called to priestly service, to the sacrificial life, and to the ministry of the Word, this declared principle of all true work for God is of the utmost importance. Under the pressure of responsibility we are all apt to forget the vital connexion which necessarily exists between what we are and what we do. In the rush of having to do with the need of the world, so variously expressed, we are in danger of forgetting the necessity of preserving unbroken our relationship with the other world of which we are citizens. Yet to be busy is no satisfactory substitute for holiness of life, nor to be taken up with the affairs of men any alternative to heart engagement with the things of God.

For who hath despised the day of small things?

THE contrast between God's promises and the visible means by which they are to be realized, is often such as to stagger the faith of His people. He calls them to undertake service for Him which is immeasurably greater, both in the demands which it makes upon them and the issues which are bound up with it, than their total resources. Moreover, His command most often comes to them, as in Zechariah's vision, at a time when everything seems unpropitious for its execution. But the invisible factor is always the greatest ; and this is postulated in His commission. God never intends men to be equal to life apart from the enduement of His Spirit and the reinforcement of His presence. The lust of numbers had been a snare to Israel on more occasions than one ; and the prophet, knowing the people with whom he had to deal, would save them from yet another failure.

Thus to despise the day of small things, either in ourselves or in others, is to deny the reality and strength of His grace. The whole history of the Christian Church is one of the multiplication of slender human resources unto the most amazing result. It is written large on the record of all its triumphs—that "God hath chosen the weak things to confound the mighty, and the things which are not to bring to nought the things which are." The man who is weak enough in himself to realize that apart from Him he can do nothing, will instinctively link his weakness by faith and obedience to Heaven's omnipotence. And he will see in small opportunities, attainments, and causes, the beginnings of Divine triumph, in which he will hasten to have share.

Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked.

ZECHARIAH entertains no idea of having exhausted the revelation of God by what he has already apprehended of it. In its fullest meanings it is as obscure to prophet as to people, though its immediate significance is never in doubt. As he meditates upon those things which have been already revealed, the consciousness increases that there are yet vast reaches of the Divine purpose to be explored; so he sets himself to receive all the further light which God would send. This is the attitude in which alone men are initiated into the mysteries of the Divine Will. When they turn from all former experience of His truth, lifting up their eyes unto Himself, fresh light breaks forth upon them. This is the path that "shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Many of us are content to live upon the memory of visions that have now faded and experiences which have now exhausted their force. Instead of regarding all our past knowledge of God as an inspiration to seek further and fuller disclosure of His purpose and power, we too often imprison our souls within some formulated doctrine which cannot, and never could, contain the whole truth. It is thus that some who once saw with saving clearness a vision of God which made them His messengers indeed, have now no message and no authority. They have not kept up with the God Who is ever marching on, Whose ways necessitate persistent obedience if they are to be increasingly understood of His people, and Who has a message for to-day which cannot convincingly be declared in the language of yesterday. Zechariah is an example to all such.

Even he shall build the temple of the Lord.

THE fullest meaning of Zechariah's visions could not be identified with the fluctuations of Israel's fortunes. The perfect relationship between God and themselves which he visioned, was directed toward creating dissatisfaction with anything lower. For Israel's peril was always that of being satisfied with the second best. This is indeed a key to the understanding of their varied history from earliest times. It is on this account that the prophets were always pointing forward to an ideal state in which prosperity accords with piety and material condition with heavenly control. None of Zechariah's contemporaries or immediate successors could erect such a temple, the centre of world-wide influence, as he foretells. Nor was it until, in the fulness of time, Christ Himself came to set about the work of building "a habitation of God through the Spirit" that this prophecy began to be fulfilled.

We who, in this dispensation of the Gospel, are ourselves being builded together, and are at the same time privileged to build the spiritual house of God, may well take to heart the lesson of this prophetic message. For of whatever is accomplished by our service Christ is Himself the doer. He may and does condescend to use our hands and to employ our energies. But He is the Architect upon Whose plans we work. And He is the inspiration of all the directed energy by which His plans materialize. If we always remembered this we should lose anxiety, while at the same time acquiring seriousness of purpose, in regard to our share in the work. And we should realize that our every strength and success entirely depends upon keeping touch with Him.

When ye fasted . . . did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?

THE captives in Babylon, being perplexed at the continuance of their exile despite their periodical fasting and mourning, sent to inquire of the priests and prophets as to the why and wherefore of God's apparent indifference. It is evident that they had almost come to the conclusion that it was a vain thing to wait upon Him; but before avowing themselves as frankly renouncing their allegiance to Him they wished for some assurance. And Zechariah is able to give it to them. With unerring precision he puts his finger on the weakness in their case. True, they had mourned and fasted, but not unto the Lord. The motive which prompted them was altogether selfish. There was no quality of true repentance in their action. Was it to be wondered at that God was not moved by such a display?

The fact that religious observance may have little, if anything, of real religion at its heart, is one that should cause us to pause. The searching test of the prophet's challenge—"Did ye at all fast unto Me?"—if applied to our ordinary participation in the externals of God's worship, too often reveals the unworthiness or inadequacy of our actuating motive. For it discovers the true centre of our life's interest. Many a prayer, correct in its sentiment, is utterly wrong in its impulse. Many a religious act forfeits moral value by reason of its self-seeking objective. This is why so much prayer fails of its answer. The prophet but anticipates the fuller light of the Gospel, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

All these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.

ZECHARIAH is no time-server who speaks smooth things in order to secure the favour of his hearers. He sees stern qualities in God and is not afraid to declare what he sees. We are commonly accustomed to conceive Him as universally beneficent, kindly tolerant, and eternally good-natured. Yet He has not so declared Himself. On the contrary, the sterner side of His nature has from the beginning been revealed. None can read the story of Eden without realizing that the angel with the flaming sword expresses upon God's part a hatred of sin which is the necessary complement of His love of man. And none can fail to see the same passion expressed both in the prohibitions of His law, and in the punishment of His people by whom that law was flouted. It is, indeed, only in the light of His hatred of sin that the mystery of His unspeakable Sacrifice becomes explicable.

Throughout the entire Word it is plain that God is ever seeking to bring His people into moral sympathy with Himself. He is teaching them in all the varied discipline of their lives, not only to love purity, and goodness, and truth, but to "abhor that which is evil." The righteousness to which He endeavours to win them is passionate in its protest against all that defiles and degrades, even to the point of utmost sacrifice. And who shall say that this moral orientation was not incarnated, and thus for ever settled, in Jesus Christ? By His Spirit indwelling our hearts, and shedding abroad there His love, we cannot fail to hate and fight to the death the things that He also hates.

His dominion shall be from sea even to sea.

ZECHARIAH sees the universal sweep of the Kingdom of Christ, embracing every nation within its borders and subduing every foe in its victories. From the lowly beginnings of a King Who comes riding upon the foal of an ass, he visions the glory of world-wide dominion and seeks to enlist the sympathies and energies of Israel with this ideal. All her past training has fitted her to receive such a King, and to extend such a Kingdom. For has she not learned the terrible greatness of God and the power which none is able to resist? Better than all others she knows how His enemies become His footstool. Alas, however, to this day, Israel has failed to take her intended part in the blessing of the world. For when "He came unto His own, His own received Him not." Nor will she recover herself until once again He comes; when, "looking upon Him Whom they have pierced," her sons shall yield Him their long-withheld allegiance.

"Unto the uttermost parts of the earth" is incorporated in Christ's commission to His disciples. He has left us the sacred duty of lifting Him up before all nations, with the assurance that so all men will be drawn unto Him. Every experience of obedience confirms this assurance and encourages us to preach the Gospel unto every creature. Yet how slack are we in the doing of this our first business! Do we realize that His purposes still wait upon our pleasure?

I will sow them among the people.

IN this way Zechariah interprets the spiritual meaning of exile. As a farmer sows his seed into the ground that it may reproduce itself, so God will deal with Israel, dispersing them among all the nations that they may preserve His truth alive and may bring forth a harvest to His glory. That they have failed so to do is no judgment upon the Divine method, nor upon the living nature of the truth which was in their keeping. For in the world of spiritual realities nothing is automatous. Human lives are only used to fulfil the decrees of grace according as they willingly co-operate with God. They may and do frustrate His Will as it concerns them : but only to be superseded by other and more useable agents.

Israel's failure has given the Church of Christ her opportunity. Using Zechariah's language, Christ declared, "The good seed are the children of the Kingdom." And it is part of the providential arrangement of Christian life that it is set in every nation to bring forth fruit unto God. At what cost to ourselves we must individually accomplish this purpose Christ has made plain, both by example and precept. For "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." Are we always willing to die to our own pleasures, prospects, and well-being if so be we may shed abroad the light of life ? Are we always willing to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" ? This is the vital test of all our religion.

So the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord.

IT is not strange that in every age the Word of God has made its most forceful appeal to the poor; for they have less to distract their attention from heavenly claims than those to whom earth calls with a thousand voices of promise. In Zechariah's day the sin of the nation, for which Divine judgment was impending, was in the main the non-moral expression of material prosperity. His message naturally angered the rich against whom it was directed. But among the poor he found his readiest auditors. The contrast between their state and the visions of hope which he declared stimulated their faith and made them allies of the prophet's purpose. They might be despised by the nobles; but cherishing in their hearts the word of Zechariah as the word of the Lord, they knew themselves to be His children and were content.

Nothing dulls spiritual sensibility so effectually as material prosperity. Now, as in Christ's day, it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. For it is difficult for those who hold much of earth's treasure to become poor in spirit. Wealth frequently begets pride, which in turn begets indifference to things which cannot be translated into terms of worldly affluence. And the tragedy of many a life is that it becomes possessed by its possessions, and is imprisoned thereby in a small world whence God is virtually excluded. The Lord's poor—rich in faith—are saved from many perils; and they have in Heaven an enduring substance.

The land shall mourn, every family apart.

IN the day to which Zechariah looks forward, when the spirit of grace and supplication shall be poured out upon Israel, when deep conviction of sin shall lay hold of the nation and a common purpose of return to the Lord shall actuate it, a solemn sense of responsibility shall rest upon individuals. Each tribe shall own its share in the national defection from God. None shall blame the other for what is the fault of all. Each family, with its dependants, shall separate itself for the serious business of meeting God and of having life adjusted to His law. Alone each has sinned; and alone each must face the grief of God, and seek at His hand mercy and pardon.

In our great hours we must be apart. For only when other voices are stilled can we hear God's voice with saving clearness. Only when we lose the support of the presence of others, even though they share our feelings of penitence, can we realize sufficiently intimate approach to Him with Whom we have to do. And only as we take upon us the burden of our responsibility, and feel its crushing weight, do we ever realize the inspiring joy of its removal by the hand of eternal Love. So also is it in all the successive experiences of the soul. Without the camp, with none other to share our tryst with Him, we really come to know the Lord. It is the glory of life—even of life marred by sin—that every man is capable of acquiring unique knowledge of God's forgiveness and favour and of giving to the world unique interpretation of His love. But this glory is only realised by each of is living "apart."

In that day there shall be a fountain opened . . . for sin and for uncleanness.

THIS is the heart and centre of the prophet's message. The polluted nation shall yet be purified. Sin which has destroyed its life shall be dealt with by the very love it has outraged. Its stain shall be cleansed; its chain shall be broken; and its poison shall be checked. In the open fountain the nation shall thus recover its power of life and be fitted to take up its divine mission. Its forfeited privilege of being God's witness to the world shall be renewed, and once again the glory of the Lord shall be upon His people. But first of all sin must be judged and put away in a fountain opened at unspeakable cost to God Himself. His love for Israel will not suffer her iniquity to be lightly ignored. Her redemption must be radical if it is to be effective.

It is to the day of Christ that the prophet looks forward. Only in Him did the love of God receive its final expression, and only the cleansing of His Blood is effective to the salvation of His people. Punishment, tribulation, suffering, exile, famine, and calamity, are all of proven powerlessness to change the heart of a nation, to crush its pride, or to alter the direction of its aim. Nothing short of Divine power applied in terms of unspeakable love can ever suffice to work such miracle. And, even so, it is only in individual lives that its efficacy is realized. As a nation Israel refused Christ when He came; and all other nations, as such, have followed Israel. Yet in every nation are those who have found life eternal in the open Fountain—and on its further side glory unspeakable.

Holiness unto the Lord.

IN the ideal life of Israel under the kingship of the Messiah—all of which is yet to be realized in the unborn future—the nation's outstanding characteristic shall be entire devotion to God. The traffic of its streets and the utensils of its households, shall all bear witness to His rule. Faith in Him shall be the order of life in all its spheres. The commonest things shall be sanctified by His presence and redeemed from all sordidness by the high purposes of His people. In that day Israel shall once again become the bright reflector of God's holiness to the universe, thus recovering the glory which has been so long forfeited by reason of sin. For the honour of service is the beauty of holiness.

What was a far-off ideal to Zechariah is a present reality to those who enthrone Christ in their hearts as King. "Holiness unto the Lord" becomes the impulse of their entire being, and even the smallest details of life are used to extend His glory. Business with men may be so done as to add some note to the harmony of His praise. Home life in all its essential duties and details may minister to His glory just as really as toil in the vineyard. For holiness does not consist in the doing of extraordinary things in an ordinary way, but of doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way. It involves a new view-point from which every part of life is seen to be a sphere of service. Nothing is common or unclean in the life over which the Lord reigns. And its witness to others is beyond value. This is, in truth, our highest privilege which, alas, we lose when we deny Him, as so often we do, the place of His right.

Should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.

IN its final appeal to conscience the prophetic word is always eminently reasonable. The prophets were not mere fault-finders who obviously condemned an errant people, but men who spoke as they saw under the quickening influences of the Divine Spirit. In this light is to be understood Malachi's charge against Israel concerning its ingratitude toward God and the unreality of its religious observances. For despite all the tenderness of His care the nation had become indifferent to His Will, while preserving an outward semblance of respect which had no inner spirit of sincerity. True, the daily sacrifices were offered—but of polluted bread and of that which was torn and lame and sick among the flocks. The people offered to God only that which was of no use to themselves—and thought to propitiate Him so. They have to learn, however, that He only regards outward things as an expression of inward faith, and that He cannot be mocked. In their heart of hearts they knew the unfitness and unworthiness of such a course, and God challenges them on the ground of a reasonableness of which they are already convinced.

Are we in no danger of falling into Israel's sin in this respect? Do not our gifts to God frequently consist of that which is otherwise worthless? Are our offerings at all to be taken as the measure of our indebtedness, and as the voice of our gratitude? If so, then it is to be feared that we have not begun to realize all that we owe Him, nor have we at all worthily apprehended His nature. He will indeed accept our humblest offerings if they are our best and our all. But He will not be trifled with.

Ye have wearied the Lord with your words.

THIS is the sternest condemnation which any prophet ever declared concerning the hollowness of Israel's religion. Bearing no relation to the life of the nation, its prayers and praises had actually tired the Most High. For behind them He saw lives from which His law was banished, and a social order in which righteousness and truth found no place. Such worship was mere mockery, an insult to His holiness and a weariness to His love. He had borne long with their contumacy and had again and again accepted their discredited professions. But now at length even His love is at an end of its endurance. Such a revelation is far more to be feared than all the prophetic forecasts of His wrath, especially when it is read in connection with Isaiah's declaration that "the Creation of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary." For it tells of the awful power of human insincerity to exhaust even the Divine nature.

In nothing do we need to be more careful than in our daily approach to God. For prayers which have no meaning beyond that of selfish desire to acquire benefit, praise which being merely conventional voices no warm gratitude for mercies past and present, and vows which have no determined purpose of loyalty to give them value, are a weariness to Him to Whom we presume to offer them. And recoil in the form of His silence must inevitably overtake all such unreality. Nothing is more to be dreaded than a God Who does not speak because He is tired of our speaking. Well might one with this fear before him pray—"be not silent to me, O Lord, lest I be like unto them that go down to the pit."

Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts.

THIS opportunity for reversal of attitude toward God, which Malachi proclaims, is strongest proof of His unchanging love. Not only have the people grievously sinned by flouting His law and by devotion to things which contradict His holiness, but they have actually robbed Him in withholding the tithes and offerings, which were but a small part of their gains but which ideally expressed their acknowledgment of His entire ownership of their lives. This apparently trivial thing carried greater significance than all their other shortcomings and wilfulness. Yet it is just here that His love meets them, offering an occasion of self-recovery. He is willing that His faithfulness should be put to the test by those who have been unfaithful to it. If they will only bring to His feet that which they have withheld from Him they shall have a convincing experience of their unchanging Lord.

With what grace is this challenge instinct as it comes to us afresh to-day. For we, too, have failed in this very thing, and yet He has not cast us off. Can He do more than woo us by the assurance He gives? Are we not blind to our highest interests in deferring to put Him thus to the test? The obvious weakness and ineffectiveness of many a Christian life will never be overcome except by a whole-hearted return to the Lord. Deferred obedience must be rendered. Diverted offerings must be paid. All the tithes must be brought in. And then will the very windows of Heaven be opened in blessing upon the life which in its present barrenness so pitifully misrepresents the Lord.

Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.

FITLY does the Old Testament close with this promise of the Sun-rising. Its final note is the major chord of hope, and its abiding expectation is of mercy triumphant over human sin. The love of God shall not be for ever defeated on the moral battlefields where men blindly fight against what they utterly misconceive,—and end by destroying themselves. Darkness shall not hold the world in eternal midnight. The Sun may be over-clouded for the moment but it is not totally eclipsed, and its light shall once again break forth for the righteous. For God Himself is light, and the earliest fiat of His power has by no means been cancelled. His purpose is fulfilling itself despite the almost total failure of men and nations to apprehend Him. Their failures indeed are being used as stepping-stones for its progress, and hence for their own ultimate blessing. And one day the earth shall be filled with the light of His glory as the waters cover the sea.

That the Sun did arise in Bethlehem, and that His beams still give light to every man that cometh into the world, confirms us to-day in our confidence toward the God of all history and all prophecy. Still have we to look forward to the meridian glory of the Sun, yet to be revealed. How fair has been the dawn! But surpassing all thought will be the full blaze, when He comes "the second time without sin unto salvation." Wherefore lift up your hearts.

We lift them up unto the Lord!

Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.

IN these words the New Testament declares on its first page the whole subject of its contents. All that follows is but an expansion and an unfolding of this great Evangel. It is alike the theme of the angelic announcement at the beginning of the volume and of the triumphant exultation of the redeemed at the end. Such a word is all-comprehensive of the Saviour's purpose and power. While primarily it foretells the unspeakable and mysterious transaction in which He made atonement for the sin of the world, by taking upon Himself the weight of its guilt and offering Himself a redemptive sacrifice, this by no means exhausts its significance. For though that great fact is both basal and central of all true life, the starting-point of all vital faith and the beginning of all living hope, its application to individual heart and life is all-important and is equally indicated.

"He shall save His people from their sins"! Not merely from their penalty, by His death; but from their power, by His life. Every devastating result of sin He purposes to repair. Every deteriorated capacity He covenants to recreate. Every enslavement of memory and power He can break. Every usurping ruler of the heart He will drive out. And every antagonism of holiness which is part of the entail of sin He is able to transform and convert into loyalty. What a tremendous claim is this! And what a wealth of experience in every age attests its justification! Let us put His Saviourhood to the practical test of our own salvation.

ST. MATTHEW ii. 2.

Where is he that is born King?

MATTHEW is essentially the evangelist of Christ's Kingship. In the pages of his Gospel we see Him moving among men with a supporting consciousness of authority, manifested as the Divine Sovereign Whose Kingdom is not of this world. The coming of the Wise Men from the East to worship at His rude cradle is strikingly prophetic of that homage which shall one day be given to Him, when in His Name every knee shall bow. If His infant days are beclouded by the foreshadowing of the Cross, they are also brightened by the foreglow of the Kingdom.

"Where is He that is born King?" is a question which we may profitably put to ourselves. For, too often, alas, even by those who profess to believe and serve Him, He is denied the throne. Men are not unwilling to accept His grace, if that can be done without yielding to His government. They are glad to have Him near to the precincts of life, in case they should come to need Him; but they will not allow Him its presidency, in case He should come to *need them!* Indeed, the common cause of the powerlessness and ineffectiveness of so much avowed Christian life to-day is to be sought in the failure to recognize Christ as King, and to realize His unquestioned control. For when "His Kingdom ruleth over all," life is invested with the sanctifying power which increasingly delivers it from all that is sordid and unworthy in motive and aim; and at the same time inspires to self-forgetting service. But when He is not so enthroned, life's course runs on to increasing weakness and worthlessness, and its true end is lost. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh, lovingly bestowed upon Him, are strangely multiplied to the enrichment of the worshipper, as well as to the service of the Saviour. But, selfishly withheld from Him, they become a positive impoverishment.

Fruits meet for repentance.

CHRIST'S herald leaves no room for doubt as to the character of Him Whom He proclaims, nor as to the nature of the claims He makes upon those to whom He comes as Saviour and Sovereign. The message of John the Baptist is, in this respect, both a preparation and a prophecy, to which we, along with those who first heard it, do well to take earnest heed. Its penetrating declaration is that faith is a force making for entire righteousness of life, and that sincere repentance is to be attested by scrupulous obedience to apprehended light. Approach to God is not to be made along a road of mere mental and emotional activity but by the painful way of self-amendment. If men are to compass His altar their hands must be washed in innocency. Fruitless repentance is simply faithless.

Is this word not needed to-day? Is there no danger of our becoming content with mere mental apprehensions of truth and duty without personal concern for matters of practical conduct? Do we not often contradict our sacred profession by continued indulgence in things doubtful or even openly sinful? Is not this the charge brought too often with justification against Christians by the unbelieving world? And does this fact not emphasize our individual responsibility to lay this word to heart?

But while the fruit which is "meet for repentance" demands on our part honest labour for its cultivation, we must bear in mind that all such moral effort is in co-operation with the Divine forces of righteousness. Just as in Nature the farmer labours at the soil, but it is the sun and shower and wind which make his work effective, so in the field of life and character. True repentance is the fruit of the Spirit. And yet the command to us is to "bring forth!"

It is written.

WHETHER in Christ or His followers, the Adversary challengesevery spiritual position which faith assumes. The opening Heaven has scarcely closed, the descending Dove has hardly settled, the approving Voice has only just ceased, when the Saviour is in grips with the foe. His conflict and conquest at the very commencement of life are a forecast of all that awaits Him in the pathway of obedience to the Father's will; for toward the close of His life He summarizes the whole experience of His earthly days which His disciples have shared with Him, as "My temptations." His example in repelling the enemy is for ever our guide into the life of victory.

How ready was His use of the sacred Scriptures, evidencing a familiarity with them which was only gained by diligent study and a careful hiding of them in His heart as the very words of God during the silent and unrecorded years at Nazareth. Knowledge of the Divine precept, and promise, and power, is the first prerequisite for successful emergence in any encounter. Neglect of the Word may be secret and hidden from all eyes, but will surely manifest itself in the crises of temptation which find men unprepared. Let us assure ourselves of victory, therefore, in our silent hours of fellowship.

Each of the Saviour's answers is a re-assertion of the very position which the enemy assails. "If Thou be the Son of God" is the challenge; to which faith responds by declaring those principles of conduct which are vital to sonship,--dependence, loyalty, and obedience. Against these no temptation can succeed; for to the man who fearlessly asserts them comes a reinforcement of Divine power which carries him through. And, like the Saviour, such an one is ministered to by the angels of God in his hour of reaction when the glow of the conflict has died down.

Ye are the light of the World.

BEHIND this declaration is an implied miracle. Christ's followers can only shine as lights in the world's gloom when all the darkness of their own hearts has been expelled by His power. No mere mental apprehension of truth is adequate, except in so far as it leads to the transformation of character by submission and obedience to its power. As the spectroscope of the scientist reveals the various primary colours of which the white ray of sunlight is composed, so the words of the Master immediately precedent to these, declare the components of that reflective holiness which makes us "children of the light." Poverty of spirit—that is, absence of pride and self-sufficiency; sincerity of repentance which mourns over past sin; meekness of disposition; earnest desire after righteousness; merciful kindness toward others; entire purity of heart and purpose—all go to make up that type of life which Christ here describes. And all emphasize the necessity of the miracle. For these are qualities which none can acquire except by the redeeming energy of the Son of God.

When He says: "Let your light shine" He implies that the imparted Divine nature, which is the outcome of our union with Him, will certainly declare itself unless it be hindered. He suggests, also, the commonest hindrance of all, under the figure of the bushel. For absorption of heart in the cares and commerce of life, thus represented, dims the light of many an one, and ultimately extinguishes it altogether. The "bushel" is a necessity in every life; but why not invert and turn it into a lamp-stand? Why not regard every imperative contact with the world of business and social life as a God-planned opportunity of illuminating the darkness which is immediately around us?

Our Father.

AT the foundation of Christ's Gospel lies the eternal fact of the Fatherliness of God; and the import of His own life among men is the unfolding of this the Divine character. His works of mercy and power are the Father's. His words of grace and life are the Father's. The will, which is the inspiring cause of all His travail and toil, is the Father's. And in the end, His suffering and sacrifice is just the Father's love in its contact with human sin.

The key-note of His Evangel is that men become sons of the Father not by natural generation but by spiritual regeneration, as they receive Him into heart and life in faith and obedience. Then to all such He teaches this lesson of prayer—"After this manner . . . Our Father."

Mark well the plural form enjoined. Relationship with the Father brings us into relationship with the family also. The Fatherhood of God revealed in the Saviourhood of Christ is the basis of true brotherhood. It is "with *all* the saints" that we come to know the extent of His love and power. And it is therefore with them all that we pray.

And further He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," Who teaches us to thus unite ourselves with Him as we pray. What an encouragement is this to those who are cast down, and almost afraid to approach God, because of conscious shortcoming and unworthiness. We do not come to Him alone, but along with the Saviour-Advocate, Who bids us call Him "Our Father"—His and ours.

How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.

ALL human excellence of character is at best but a feeble reflection of the Divine. The love and foresight of an earthly father, which secures as far as may be the highest good of his child, is only a remote echo of the affection and wisdom of God. To be assured of this is the secret of perfect peace and the inspiration of all confident prayer. In our asking, seeking, and knocking—which represent degrees of increasing importunity in supplication—we have the unfailing encouragement of the goodwill of our Father. Hence, however urgent our prayer, it is never to be regarded as an overcoming of His reluctance but rather as a laying-hold of His covenanted willingness to bless. We have no need to "storm the gate of Heaven" by our beseeching; for He waits to be gracious to us at all times.

Note the limitation which Christ here expresses. He does not promise that we shall receive all that we ask; for often we ask amiss. The greatest calamity that could befall us would be to have some of our prayers literally answered and some of our desires actually fulfilled. But our Heavenly Father gives only "good things"—things that are for our highest well-being, things that will minister to our surest development in holiness of life and character. This is the explanation of the many seemingly unanswered petitions which have sometimes disturbed our faith in prayer. The things He withholds are only those that are not good for us. No *good* thing is ever withheld from him who walks uprightly.

There arose a great tempest . . . then He arose.

THE greatest difficulty in many a life comes with the storm which arises after Christ has been accepted, and when an honest following of Him has begun. When men commence loyally to carry out His instructions a tempest of opposition often arises to break furiously upon them ; and danger to the little craft of life seems imminent. Now, it is well to remember that the greatest havoc any storm can cause is not in the loss of material things, not in the wreck of the boat and its gear, but in the weakening and destruction of faith. To conclude that God is somehow indifferent, is at once to expose the feebleness of our trust and our tragic ignorance of Him. For when we seem to be overwhelmed we are really overshadowed. When we imagine we are being deserted we are only being disciplined. Let us remind ourselves that "He maketh the clouds His chariots, and walketh upon the wings of the wind."

For He is never far away from us in the hour of our danger ; and above the howling of the tempest He can hear the feeblest cry for help. What more sufficient help can we have than just to be assured of His presence ? The blackest darkness that ever enwraps the soul is not that of sorrow, or trial, or loss ; but of inability to realize His nearness For did He forsake us for an hour all would indeed be lost. But how safe are they who can stay their souls upon His promise to be with them even when they pass through the waters. And wondering love fills their hearts who experience the "great calm" of spirit which His presence creates !

Follow Me.

THE history of Matthew the publican, to whom Christ addressed this call, and his subsequent experience upon responding to it, is full of instruction and encouragement to us. To begin with, he was a man who had failed and forfeited all claim to consideration. As a Levite he had already been privileged to engage in the service of God, which for some reason he had deserted ; and Christ's call came as a renewed opportunity—a second chance. How great is the love which reaches down lower than our failure and self-despair in order to lift us up! When we have been overcome by the seductive charms of the world, and entangled in its snares so that we forsake Him entirely, He is still near us and does not for one moment forget us. It is of His unchanging grace that He never gives us up.

And with the call to arise and leave all that has ensnared and held—the golden bonds of the world's forging—comes the imparted power of obedience. Christ is first recognized, then trusted, and then followed ; and along that pathway of discipleship there lies, for Matthew and for us, unspeakable blessing. It inevitably leads to a varied experience in which light and darkness closely impinge, in which joy is often neighboured by suffering, and in which the love of God is strangely mingled with the reproach of men. Indeed, since it is a following of Him to which we are committed, it must lead us round by the Cross and make us partakers of its pain. But it leads us on to share His risen life in all its redemptive influences ; and so to realize our own highest possibilities in soul-winning service.

Are we prepared thus to follow Him ? For He calls us to-day as ever.

I came not to send peace, but a sword.

AT first sight it almost seems as if this self-declaration of Christ is in direct contradiction of all that we have been led to look for in the Prince of Peace. For He plainly declares that His mission is that of the sword. That there is no inconsistency, however, in this, we are assured when we remember that first and last He came to save men from sin. Where sin is found there can be no peace except such as follows the sword. In the deepest sense of all, He must fail of His redeeming purpose if He comes into the field of human need not having His sword girt upon His thigh.

The first dawning of Christ-consciousness inevitably strikes a deadly blow at sin, destroying vain desires, unholy imaginings, and base loves ; and bringing the smart of sorrow, regret, and remorse into life. As that consciousness of Him increases, and we come to know Him better, it is as though successive blows were aimed at our self-complacency and satisfaction. For His ideals of life are always swordedged, and the enlightened heart becomes a battlefield. Further still, as we embrace the privilege and duty of witnessing to Him in the world, we realize that He is the Christ of the sword. For we find immediately that His very command to make our faith visible is a cut at our hindering relationships. Who does not know the severance between friend and friend—even between child and parent, husband and wife—which the sword of Christ makes ? Do not let us shrink from Him, however, on this account. For the forging of His sword was in the fires of Gethsemane and Calvary, and the Hand that wields it for our blessing is nail-pierced.

Come . . . take . . . learn.

"*COME!*" Christ gently suggests that we have been living too far away from Him. It may be that our deeds have been evil; and so we have feared to come to the light. Or, the lawful occupations of life, its duties and delights, its tools and toys, have become a positive engrossment to us. Or, we have absorbed ourselves in our personal concerns of joy or sorrow. But whatever be the cause, we are living too far away from Christ; and to come to Him involves our coming away from every engrossment, and the renunciation of all that cannot be brought into His presence.

"*Take!*" Life's central government must be changed if the old unrest is not to creep back into the forgiven heart. The Saviour must become the Sovereign. Christ's Will must dethrone self-will. His purposes must become the passion of our lives. Then, just as the ordinary wooden yoke of agricultural use unites the strength of oxen for the work of a common task, so the yoke of Christ ensures a sufficiency of power to the yielded soul. To take Christ's yoke is just to accept His commission to daily duty in the certainty of His abundant enduement for the task.

"*Learn!*" Of this we cannot fail if the earlier steps are honestly taken. As men company with Christ, they come instinctively to refer everything to His judgment and to test everything by His standards. This is, of course, a state rather than a step. For there is so much to unlearn and to undo, to lose and to acquire, that life itself is not long enough for the whole lesson. But to the one who is willing to learn Christ will both unlock Heavenly treasures and explain earthly mysteries in such a way as to bring increasing rest of heart to the world-wearied and self-tired heart. There is no other way of peace than this triple invitation indicates.

He that is not with Me is against Me.

THERE is something startling in words which seem to invest Christ with a quality akin to narrowness and intolerance. Yet on quiet thought we find that this statement is not contradictory but complementary. For if He is intolerant it is not with the intolerance of earth, which is usually the expression of fragmentary and imperfect knowledge, but with that of Heaven—the expression of entire insight and understanding. With such knowledge, He would be less Divine than He is were He not intolerant of every rival. The issues involved are so vital that He would be less our Saviour than He is did He not declare them so plainly.

Note how this high strain characterizes all His teaching. We find it in the nature of His self-claims: "I am *the* Light of the world"; "I am *the* Bread of life"; "I am *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life." Again we see it in the commands which He lays upon His followers: "Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God"; "Follow thou *Me*." And yet again it is expressed in His imposition of self-discipline upon the honest disciple: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. If thine hand offend thee, cut it off"! In all this we see God in contact with human life, and recognize the Divine intolerance of the word which challenges every other lord, which summons us from every other absorption, and which forbids any disloyal and disastrous tolerance of sin. Only as invested with this character could it be the Word of Life to us. The one who is not *with* Him in all the active sympathies of life, who is not living in obedient agreement with His programme, who is not working in loyal co-operation with His power—based upon personal faith in Himself—is *against* Him. In so far as we really know Him, we cannot be tolerant of anything that derogates from His glory as Saviour and Redeemer.

Treasure hid in a field.

THIS is one of the most vivid of Christ's parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. Its possible interpretation is twofold,—at the same time illustrating the Divine and emphasizing the human side of the great transaction by which men become partakers of the Kingdom. For the treasure hid in a field points to the worth of the individual soul, which though it may be unrecognized by the personal owner—or rather tenant of the field, and is in consequence to all intent and purpose lost, is nevertheless infinitely great and precious to God. His estimate of its value is for all time expressed in terms of the great Sacrifice by which alone it is "found"; and by the care with which it is guarded and increased.

But its chief message is as to the human side. For the Kingdom of Heaven is, as it were, hidden; and men must make its search the first objective of life. Then when its wealth and all the enrichment and enlargement it promises are realized, there comes the call to sacrifice. This is surely Christ's correction of the popular error of our own day, that His Gospel is a scheme whereby the maximum good may be secured for the minimum cost. It has been well said of the Kingdom of Heaven that while its entrance fee is nothing its subscription is all that a man has! But how great is the satisfaction which transfigures the sacrifice into gladness! For the treasure is absolute. It enriches life with a new working capital, and makes even ordinary men spiritual millionaires. Let us not fail personally to make it ours. For nothing we may in the alternative gain or keep is comparable.

St. Matthew xiv. 16.

Give ye them to eat.

CHRIST'S commands always make conscious our poverty and inability. We may have every desire to serve Him and to bless other lives, but we have a restraining consciousness of insufficiency which checks the impulse and forbids the venture. We know only too well that we have barely sufficient for ourselves. It is in such straits, however, that we may learn the strengthening lesson of His miraculous multiplication of every surrendered resource.

Sincere confession of insufficiency is the first step toward the fulfilment of the command. When the call comes, clear and unmistakable, to carry the Bread of Life to some needy soul, we are at once thrown back upon ourselves. And yet He Who gives the command knows full well just what are our resources. He is well aware, before we tell Him, that we have only "five loaves and two fishes." We have but small and slender provision it is true; but we have HIM! Hence every command is a covenanted possibility of sufficiency.

"Bring them hither to Me" must precede the taking of them to the multitude. Even our best and largest things are utterly inadequate, except as they are put in His hand and at His disposal. But then they are transmuted; and from being mere loaves and fishes they become the very food of Heaven to those to whom we minister at His bidding. Remember, however, it is always in the breaking of our yielded things that they are multiplied. He gives them back to us—broken for distribution. And when the service is accomplished we find our own lives have become enriched beyond all thought. It takes indeed twelve baskets to hold the overplus which is the portion of the obedient disciples.

What an honour to dispense Heavenly hospitality with these our own hands!

Lord, help me.

IF this is the shortest, it is also the strongest prayer of which we have record. When the heart is moved by a sense of profound need it involuntarily reveals itself. And never so truly as when bowed at the feet of the Lord.

For He entirely enters into the burdens which press and the problems which perplex. Are we beset by temptation and harassed by the adversary? So was He. Are we anxious, as this heathen woman was, for the blessing of those dear to us? So indeed is He. Do material insecurities and insufficiencies fill us with foreboding? He had not where to lay His head and did not possess a penny. Indeed, we might traverse the whole range of human experience without touching a single level upon which Christ Himself has not trodden. And hence, when we cry for help, it is to One Who fully understands.

Then also faith looks to Him not only as knowing us completely but as entirely able to help. There is a definiteness about a cry like this which voices a trust in His ability and willingness such as He cannot deny. And though He sometimes subjects our faith to the test of waiting it is only to give a fuller reward.

How blessed is the truth that we may have His ear whenever we call, and realize His faithfulness whatever our need! A thousand times a day I may call in my need—"Lord, help me"; and just as often as I cry shall I find His power waiting upon my faith. Best of all I shall never be upbraided for my frequent failures, but shall always be encouraged to start afresh.

Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias.

CHRIST'S interest in what men say of Him is simply His interest in them. Hence this query is not an expression of His curiosity but of His concern; for right conceptions of Him are essential to right relationship with Him. While the answer here recorded serves to reveal the chaos of men's minds in respect of Him, it does far more. It shows also the perplexing many-sidedness of His character, which at once mystifies and masters those who come to know Him and is part of His eternal attractiveness. There is something in Him which identifies Him to various minds with John and Elijah and Jeremiah. The wonder is not that He should be like any one of them but that He should be like all three!

The outstanding characteristic of John's life was his aloofness. He stood apart from the world, manifesting at the same time a disregard and a concern which impressed and drew the multitudes to him to hear a stern denunciation of sin and a drastic message of repentance. In the life of Elijah the arresting feature was his authority. Neither king nor priest daunted him in his implacable opposition to idolatry. He stood before God; and hence had no lack of courage in standing before men, nor in calling an entire nation to face the issue and choose between worship and wickedness. Jeremiah was unlike either. The conspicuous quality of his life and ministry was his tenderness. His were the tears of one who loved men, and who brought home to them the message of the everlasting love of God.

Christ united in Himself the aloofness of John, the authority of Elijah, and the tenderness of Jeremiah. The tragedy, however, then and now, is that recognition of Him should evoke respect and admiration only without faith and love.

No man, save Jesus only.

THE Transfiguration was one of the great crises in Christ's life. Up to that time He had been veiled and disguised even to His closest followers. From henceforth the three who shared His nearest intimacy knew Him in an entirely new way as the Beloved Son of God. For there on the holy mount they saw Christ being strengthened for the final strife and sorrow by an altogether new assurance of the love of the Father.

Moses and Elijah are the typical representatives of the Law and the Prophets. They stand for all the moral and spiritual truth which had illumined men and led them God-ward previous to the coming of the Lord Christ. Their work was the foreglow of the dawn, the promise of the clear shining of the Light of the World. All that they declared was fulfilled in Him. Hence it was that in that hour on the mountain, while they faded from the view of the bewildered three, "Jesus only" remained. They, like their work and their authority, vanished from sight when they had handed on to Christ its fulfilment as the last task of His life, to be accomplished only on Calvary. He remained, as He ever will, the solitary Lord of all power and worship.

This then is the watchword of the present as well as the record of the past. To see "no man save Jesus only" is the open secret of all assured salvation, of all abiding inspiration, of all adequate strength, and of all effective life and service. For indeed there *is* no other man beside Him! Let us then daily climb up above the dust and din of earth into the mountain of prayer and fellowship where we can see Him clearly and apprehend Him increasingly. For the whole work of life lies beyond the foot of the hill. But its success is determined there.

So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you.

HOW much emphasis Christ places upon the creation and cultivation of right relationship between man and man. It is as though He would have us regard it as part of the attestation of a man's relationship with God that he is at peace also with the whole world, and in particular with his brethren.

And yet how common is the sin of cherished resentment, and how easy of specious self-justification. It is never difficult for any one to persuade himself that intolerable wrong or invasion of rights has taken place; when quiet consideration would often convince him that the injury has been unintentional, the slight unmeant, the wrong merely thoughtless. Christ teaches us to estimate our fellows at their best and not at their worst. The strong note of His proclamation of the Kingdom is that of brotherhood, with its implicate of mutual love.

But His most insistent emphasis is placed on the fact that any spirit of unforgiveness puts us hopelessly out of touch not only with the one involved but with God. There is something in a hot, angry heart which makes a man incapable of exercising simple repentance and faith which condition God's forgiveness. Consequently he remains unblessed. There is something, too, in an implacable and ungracious spirit which strangles true prayer at its very birth. Consequently his prayer is wingless and never reaches the Throne. May not this be the explanation of many unsatisfied and barren Christian lives? And may not the message of the Gospel to such to-day be the honest and humiliating duty of getting right with others as a necessary preliminary to getting right with God?

Go and sell. . . . Come and follow.

WITH unerring skill Christ diagnoses the need and lays His finger upon the seat of the disorder of every man who comes to Him. His demand to the young man who sought of Him the way of Life is thus to be interpreted and understood. Warm desires, fair record, and keen sensibilities may all exist alongside of some engrossing absorption which cancels the spiritual value of them all. The one thing lacking may in reality be the consequence of something already possessed and loved too well; and indeed most frequently is. How sincere is the Master in dealing with such an one. He does not lower His standards in order to make it easy for any willingly-embarrassed man to become His disciple. The realities of the case are altogether too urgent.

Note well the order of His words to the sincere seeker. First "go," and then "come"! The idol must be dethroned by one's own hand. The entanglement must be deliberately cut by the man himself. The determining choice must be made in a moral solitude which no deterring influences are allowed to invade.

Blessed is the man who comes back to His feet bearing the proceeds of his selling which are henceforth to be consecrated to His use. For he has lost all only to find ALL! But we see here the possibility of a true realization of Christ bringing blight and not blessing when His dictum is not unhesitatingly obeyed. The greatest of all tragedies is that of the man who goes away, not to sell and then to return and abide, but a sorrowing captive of possessions which have become his possessor.

Grant that these . . . may sit . . . the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left.

HAD this request been prompted by mere desire for prominence it could not but have met with rebuke. Christ recognized, however, the love toward Himself which was its impulse; and estimated at its true worth the affection of these His friends who longed, not only then but in the dim future too, to be as close to Him as possible. That is why He does not deny their request, but enunciates the conditions which govern that close fellowship and spiritual power which they seek. The place they desired could only be theirs by an identity with Him in the Cross; and in declaring this He did not seek to dissuade but to enlighten them, lest they should miscalculate the strength of their purpose.

The desire of the loving heart to live as closely to Christ as is at all possible, is warranted not merely by the native demands of love but by the nature also of that holy fellowship. For he who is admitted to the sacred intimacies of close companionship with Him is thereby both inspired in will and empowered in action, and so qualified for service. With such desire Christ is never at variance.

But those who would sit at His right hand and on His left must needs learn that the way thither is the way of sacrifice. No spiritual advancement is possible except by crucifixion of self, by dethronement of self-will, and by utter abandonment of a man's entire being to the Will of God. The Cross stands not only for objective truth, but for subjective experience also. It is the only pathway to the highest life of all, a life with power to serve and to save.

Go work to-day in my vineyard.

A VITAL part of the Gospel of the Kingdom is its demand for life-service. When a man has entered into assured filial relationship with God the call inevitably comes to give himself to the work of the vineyard. His response both tests his profession and attests his sincerity.

Christ's parable is directed toward our self-discovery in this respect, for it at once proclaims grace to the repentant man and judgment upon the insincere. The one who at first bluntly declines to engage in the service demanded—probably on the score of the world's attractiveness, the greater freedom of an unpledged life, or the fancied importance of some already-made engagement—ultimately repents. Nor is it difficult to estimate some at least of the influences which brought him to a worthier frame of mind. The grief of his father, the unchecked uprising of a sense of duty, the discovery of an inner inexplicable incompleteness, all contributed toward his victory over that natural disinclination to reverse openly a former wilfulness, of which we all know something. But "he repented and went," and found the work still awaiting him! The fact is that God seldom if ever gets more from any of us than the belated obedience of repentance; for few obey His first call. How great is the grace which accepts this and does not forbid us the fields!

On the other hand, the merely sentimental recognition of responsibility of the one who says, "I go, sir, and went not," leads to permanent self-exclusion. Knowledge which is not converted into obedient service is the heaviest condemnation which can rest upon any man. Therefore, "go work to-day." For to-morrow is coming; and with it the judgment.

They made light of it.

CHRIST puts His finger with unerring directness on the root causes of the soul's disorders and disasters. For He knows what is in men—both of good and evil. Here He shows that the spirit of unconscious trifling is apt to grow upon them until some circumstance reveals the moral dry-rot which has, all unsuspected, been going on. These men in the parable certainly did not begin by slightingly rejecting the invitation of a King. The trifling habit had grown upon them; and this was their self-revealing crisis.

The subject matter of their proffered excuses is too worthless for consideration. For what are a farm and merchandise in comparison with the things of the Kingdom of Heaven? They may, of course, be made into excuses by the insincere and unwilling man, but can never be seriously set forth as reasons for the rejection of the Divine invitation. The fact is, however, that these things are constantly increasing their grip upon the lives of those who willingly yield themselves to them, until they cannot be shaken off. Then, when challenged by some demand of the Son of God, they flame into hot and fierce revolt. To such lengths does habitual light-hearted trifling with eternal things bring men.

Let us be seriously on our guard against this besetting danger. For to yield to any spirit which treats the precepts and promises of God as things of little moment, which may be carelessly neglected now in the vain hope that in any future time of need they may be turned to, is the pathway of disaster. For God will not wait for ever upon our convenience. We trifle with Him at our own peril.

How often would I . . , and ye would not!

CHRIST'S lament over Jerusalem follows hard upon His denunciation of those who professed to be the religious leaders and teachers of His day. His sternest words were pronounced against the men who while ostensibly living in the light of truth so entirely opposed the Truth Incarnate. For their spirit and attitude had not unnaturally communicated itself to the entire people, predisposing them to reject Him as He announced His mission of salvation. Such is the outcome of the influence which men constantly exert one upon another, and its serious responsibility.

"*How often would I?*"—What a revelation these words afford of the heart of Christ in its yearning solicitude to bless even the thankless and ungracious. It is as though again and again He had looked out upon those who were defenceless and in danger, as chicks from a bird of prey, and had longed to shelter and save them. This is the interpretation of all His loving invitations which had fallen on unheeding ears. And yet, despite the ingratitude and heedlessness with which it was received, the warmth of His love was not chilled. His "how often?" speaks of a boundless tenderness and pity which even the unwillingness of men could not destroy.

"*And ye would not.*"—It is on this account that every ill from which Christ could have delivered comes upon them. For it is a certainty that He can do nothing for us except as we are willing He should. Faith in Him is not a mere assent of the mind but a consent also of the will. And if any of us is unblessed the cause of our condition is to be sought not in Him but in ourselves. Alas! that He should so often have to say of us, as of Jerusalem, that having opened His heart to us and called us to Himself we "would not."

ST. MATTHEW xxiv. 44.

Be ye also ready.

NOTHING is clearer in the whole range of Christ's teaching regarding the future than the certainty of His Coming, nor the uncertainty also of its time. That His people have in this our day very largely lost sight of this fact, which should be their inspiring hope, is one of the results of the spirit of worldliness which has been allowed to invade His Church. For when men's hearts are absorbed in present engrossments and fastened upon material good they are disinclined to hail with gladness the tidings of the great Event which will mean the interruption of all that goes to make up the gladness and glory of their life. And yet the one unmistakable certainty of the future, which is otherwise so largely hidden from us, is that Christ is to come again,—and without warning. His exhortation to readiness is in reality the sum total of His ethic.

For what does it mean to be thus ready for His Return ? Not the neglect of ordinary duty, nor the unfulfilment of common responsibility in favour of any exercise falsely regarded as more spiritual. Into this error not a few have fallen, to the utter discredit of the whole glorious truth of His Coming. Rather does it mean the elevation of all these things into the service of His Kingdom. For it is as servants we are bidden to watch for our Lord. It is as those who are doing His Will that we shall recognize Him.

Is our life of such quality that we are unashamedly ready to continue it in His immediate presence ? Do we love his Appearing because we love Him supremely ?

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

THIS is a part of the Saviour's parable of the human brotherhood. As the Son of Man He identified Himself with all need, claimed all love, and judged all selfishness. On the one hand He accepts every service lovingly rendered to the poor, the hungry, the sick, the sad, as offered to Himself. On the other hand He rebukes every selfishness which withholds and withdraws from human need, as being the expression of a hostile attitude toward Him. And at the same time He lifts a corner of the veil which hides eternity from our view and reveals the ultimate issues both of earth's love and earth's selfishness.

Such words as these invest all our contacts with the world with new meaning. For they proclaim that everything in life gains in value or sinks to worthlessness according to its relationship to His central government. And this ideal of living in all things as unto Christ is in itself an uplift and an inward impulse. For life without such ennobling inspiration is apt to degenerate into the material and the sordid. To regard it, however, as an earthly opportunity for the fulfilment of Heavenly obligation, is to give it wings wherewith to soar into the clear atmosphere of fellowship with Him and wherewith to speed also to the service of the needy and oppressed.

It is possible for the loftiest love to be seen shining in beauty in the heart of the lowliest deed; and we may be certain that whoever fails to recognize it there, He for Whom it is intended will not miss it when, at the close of the day, He reckons with His servants.

ST. MATTHEW xxvi. 45.

Sleep on now, and take your rest.

CHRIST'S closest disciples and most trusted friends failed Him in the fierce heat of His life's crisis. In the last great struggle of His soul, He Who had poured out His own love so freely, sought for Himself some heartening cordial of human devotion. How pathetic and tragic it is, that in that hour when all was darkest and hardest He should be disappointed. What a heart-piercing rebuke did these words of His convey to them in that hour of His victory which was so soon to look like utter defeat. "Sleep on now! The hour of your great opportunity, and of My great need, has gone never to return. Sleep on now! as long and as soundly as you may. You have missed your chance of ministering to Me. The good angels have embraced it and have done what you might have done. Sleep on now, and take your rest!"

He was not ironical in that hour of His disciples' failure. He spoke out of a broken heart, crushed by disappointment and sad for the men who had themselves lost what Eternity could never recover to them. However wakeful they may now become they cannot regain their lost opportunity. For the future, however carefully guarded, never atones nor makes up for the neglect of past days; such a loss of opportunity must be eternal.

The history of most of our failures is the history of similar neglected or unrecognized opportunities. The hour which is big with some crisis of fate usually looks just like one of the ordinary hours of the day, and gives no hint of its greatness. The disguise of the commonplace tests both our powers of perception and our readiness of action. But invariably we awaken to our loss sooner or later; for Christ loves us too well to have it otherwise. We get to know when it is too late that Christ has been asking us to watch with Him, and that we have preferred our ease.

A crown of thorns.

THE plaited thorns was merely a rough jest of the brutal soldiery who were making merry over the contrast between Christ and Cæsar. They could not understand how any one so defenceless and weak should seriously put forward a claim to kingship. So they crowned Him in mocking derision.

But in doing so they were acting more appropriately and symbolically than they knew. The crown of thorns was in reality the only fitting crown of Christ's life. Other crowns He had already refused. This one He silently accepted and wore. For it spoke to Him of the curse which He lifted and bore for all men. It expressed all the poignancy of human sorrow which He shared and carried for the whole race. It fittingly symbolized the disguised glory of a life of suffering and sacrifice; and it has become His imperishable honour. Here His "love so amazing, so Divine" is seen at its fairest and fullest.

While, however, the crown of thorns has become one of the marks to lead men to Him, telling as it does of His unspeakable sacrifice, it reminds them also of the awful potency of their sin. For what the Roman soldiers did, we too may do. We may crown and crucify Him afresh by our practical rejection of His claims, by our heedlessness of His calls, by our trifling or serious indifference to His love. We may dishonour Him, as they did in an hour of sinful mirth, to our eternal shame. Yet even then His love will continue to flow out toward us. His crown of thorns will still declare His saving grace.

Lo, I am with you alway.

IN many respects this, Christ's last word, is His greatest. For it promises that all His disciples had already known Him to be, all they had experienced in Him, should be amplified. The perfect understanding and sympathy, the sure guidance and inspiration, the miraculous power of defence and deliverance which had blessed them during those hallowed days, they were henceforth to know not in part but fully, and not merely occasionally, as hitherto, but always. The history of the Christian Church in every subsequent age has been simply the unfolding of this proclamation. All the victory, extension, and progress of the Kingdom has been due to the abiding presence of the King.

Note that this word is not absolute, but contingent. It is indissolubly linked with the command to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Its life-giving experience can only be known by those who are actually endeavouring to obey the call to herald the Evangel. Failure in consciousness of His nearness, which we often deplore, is usually traceable directly or indirectly to failure in strenuous and whole-souled service. For this is not a promise but a fact. Whatever happens He is with His people in unconditioned love. But the degree of their realization of Him, with all that it means, is altogether dependent upon their personal obedience.

Christ must be enthroned and obeyed "all the days," if we would have Him consciously near when the danger is imminent and the need immediate. Every day is *the* great day of life to His disciples. For every day He is at hand.

Forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house.

THIS Gospel is peculiarly the record of the Servant of God. From this angle of vision the second Evangelist caught the revelation of the Lord; and throughout his is the presentation of the holy activities of His earthly days in His contacts with the burdens and problems of men. Other inspired writers may dwell on His unique relationship to the Father,—upon the synagogue aspects of His life. Mark's abiding impressions are of His entering into the house, and His manifestation there of the power which fellowship and intimacy with God bestows.

The synagogue and the house! How entirely is the Christian life comprehended in this twofold aspect. Worship and work, contemplation and action, meditation and mediation make up for all of us life's whole content. And their interaction is clear and unmistakable. It is in the synagogue that we learn Heaven's secrets. It is in the house, with its humdrum duties, its recurrent needs, and its monotonous round, that we proceed to prove their dynamic strength. The only effective preparation for life is regularly and frequently to keep tryst with the Lord in some synagogue of His appointment. And the only worthy outcome of the blessing of those sacred hours is in close and patient application to the work of some house, also of His appointment.

To bring the odour of the Holiest, of "myrrh, aloes, and cassia," into the atmosphere of the common-place, is to follow Christ in the plan and pattern of His life-work.

It was noised that He was in the house.

WHEREVER Christ went it was the same. His presence could never be mistaken, nor His influence avoided. Whether it is into the house at Capernaum, or into the habitation of any human heart that He comes, the fact that He is present is attested by what happens there. For there are indubitable evidences that a new force is at work, that a new order is inaugurated, that a new government is established. Nor could it be otherwise since He is the very Lord of all power.

What are to be regarded as such evidences of His incoming? To mention but a few, there is, first of all, the adoption of His attitude of both separation and contact in regard to the world. For His indwelling power at once expels unworthy and worldly loves and inspires life with a passion to bless the world by bringing to it the saving Word. Then there is also an acknowledgment of His ownership,—not in any merely theological but in a sternly practical way. For He abides in the house entirely upon the terms of obedience, and only as we do whatsoever He says. Further, there is a growing approximation to His likeness and reflection of His character in the simple graces of unselfishness, purity, generosity, and love, for which all life's duties supply a perfect screen. These are amongst the commonest things which silently—and yet how loudly!—proclaim to the beholding world that He is in the house.

Once this is noised abroad He never fails to attract the hungry, eager, wistful worldlings to Himself. The surrendered life becomes His medium of display and the scene of a saving and healing work in which the glory is so entirely His that the mere house which He thus honours is made for ever obscure.

That they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth.

THE call to holy intimacy with Christ by no means ended with its acceptance by the Twelve. Its echoes have reverberated down all the ages, assuring His people of His purpose, admitting them into His fellowship, and commissioning them to His service. Every extension of the Kingdom has had its beginnings in some heart-response to this invitation; and its significance is yet unexhausted.

"*That they should be with Him.*"—To be "with" Christ means much more than to live in merephysical proximity to Him. It expresses union of will and life, the sympathy of a man's entire moral being with the aim and intent of the Saviour. Then, to the one whose decision has been recorded by a forsaking of every other attraction, this word gives the secret of the only effective qualification for the duties of the life embraced. Companionship with Him alone makes His people courageous to carry out His programme. In the secret place they learn what are His resources—and theirs. At His feet their faults are corrected, their character formed, and their hearts inspired.

"*That He might send them forth.*"—They do not rush hither and thither in any haphazard search of service. Each has his own particular appointment both as to his field and his fellow-servant. And each has the steadying consciousness that he is doing the Will of his Lord—nothing less, nothing more, and nothing else. And when at the end of the long day He calls His disciples once again to Him, that they may be "with" Him to go out no more for ever, each one shall then know in the fulness of his reward how great has been the importance of his own bit of work as part of the Eternal Plan.

When the sun was up, it was scorched.

THIS is one of the most significant instances of Christ's discriminating characterization of the hearers of the Word. It stands for those who "receive it with gladness," but who having no depth of character are incapable of any depth of conviction. In consequence, when the first flood of emotion has ebbed and the opposition in which loyalty to the truth always involves men arises, it finds them without any strength of resistance. As they wilt and wither they become a reproach to the cause they have professed.

The severest condemnation which any man ever incurs is that he endures "but for a time." Christian profession is, in the nature of the case, inevitably exposed to the fierce heat-rays of the world-sun. If its roots of faith do not strike down deep into the soil of truth and firmly entwine there around the central verities from whence sustaining richness is alone to be drawn, it cannot but fade. And this is to fail indeed of the grace of God and to involve His reputation as the heavenly Husbandman. The world is always ready to point with scorn at those who do not fulfil the early promise of their declared purpose; and there is surely nothing which so adversely affects Christ's cause as the case of such. Hence our personal responsibility for the deepening of our own lives.

There is a promise of our Lord which every one who is exposed to this common danger may plead. It is that the sun, however fierce its rays, "shall not smite thee by day." And it implies that the cooling rain and dew from Heaven make it possible not only to withstand the scorching heat but to derive also positive good from it.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them.

THIS must surely be the outcome of every saving contact with Christ. When He has cleansed and liberated any man from the stain and bondage of sin, He makes him a potential witness to those who cannot refute his testimony nor fail to appreciate the change wrought in him.

Christ's concern in this instance is twofold. First, He wants to bring the man himself into the fullest blessing and largest life. It is on this account that He commissions him to a service in which both his own assurance shall deepen and his latent powers shall be developed and secured for the Kingdom. He sees in a poor saved demoniac a potential ambassador. The remnant of a life so long lived under evil sway is not without glorious possibility in the eyes of Christ. He redeems this man, and all others also, from destruction unto devotion. Nor is His work complete until, inspired by grateful love, He has set the saved one on the pathway of a service in which he shall both find himself and accomplish the purpose of the Lord.

Then, also, Christ's love yearns over those unblessed ones whom this man may reach in a way quite impossible to any one else. For their need is no less than was his, and it can be met in only the same way,—by the healing touch of the Saviour. So his experience is to become his evangel in a sphere where he is best known, and where, on that very account, the difficulties are greatest. But the Saviour's command to return thither itself carries the implicate of His own co-operation. The unseen Master goes with His servant to share the toil and multiply its fruit.

ST. MARK vi. 31.

Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while.

HOW great is Christ's solicitude for His servants! He Who so often sought the healing solitudes for Himself shared their secret with His weary and burdened friends that they too might learn the recreative power of undisturbed fellowship with God. For in the desert, free from the distractions of ordinary life and duty, men are the better able to hold communion with Him Who speaks to their hearts most clearly when other voices are silenced.

Amid the busy rush of our modern life how necessary it is that we should frequently seek the seclusion of His presence. For in the throng and press we are in danger of losing that elevation of motive and purpose which conditions all worthy discipleship and of becoming mechanical alike in our piety and practice. Then, too, exhaustion of strength makes long continuance upon the highest levels almost impossible, except as we are renewed by regenerating contacts with the Lord. Indeed, it is not too much to say that every peril which besets busy lives would be avoided did we but respond to the wooing invitations of the Master. For there, as our hearts are opened to Him, He can correct our mistaken estimates, renew our expended energies, illumine our beclouded minds, and reassure our discouraged hearts. And of all these ministries we stand in need.

This present age is full of restlessness. Activity is apt to expand and meditation to contract to dangerous limits. Purposeful withdrawal to commune with Christ is the only antidote to its deadly feverishness. And it is adequate and available to us all.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed . . .

OF what sort is the effluence of our lives? This is the certain test of the profession of our lips. For it reveals unerringly the hidden man of the heart, which is the real man in every one of us. This is the primary objective of all Christ's teaching—to reveal men to themselves. His first work is always to create and quicken that self-consciousness without which there can never be any true consciousness of God. For it is only as the knowledge of indwelling sin becomes a pressing certainty that men incline toward submission to the saving and delivering power of the Lord.

Habits and actions reveal disposition. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Crises, whether of good or evil opportunity, do not make a man. They simply serve to disclose him. None of us is ever really surprised into any of the grosser forms of sin. Onlookers may be surprised at us, but we are not ourselves surprised. For we know full well the secret process which has long gone on. The final fall has been long delayed, it may be; but it was all along inevitable.

It is full of significance that the first of this terrifying catalogue of sins of which Christ speaks is "evil thoughts." In the thought-life every unholiness has its birth; and it is there that the control of Christ must be manifested if His salvation is to be effective in any life. He alone can keep our thoughts from ranging over forbidden fields, and inspire a love of "whatsoever things are pure, and lovely, and of good report" which ensures our thinking of these things.

Whosoever will come after Me, let him . . . take up his cross, and follow Me.

CHRIST loves men far too well to hide from them the cost and consequence of discipleship. He never veils the hardness of the way, nor tones down the moral requirement, in order to gain allegiance. Indeed it would almost seem as though He deliberately planned to drive some men away while drawing others to Him. For the fact is that throughout His earthly life, as now, His Word both won and winnowed, sifted and saved those who heard it.

The Cross signifies to the disciple just what it signified to the Master. In His life it stood for the last malignant expression of the world's hostility. From the very outset the world "knew Him not." As He toiled and travailed for its blessing the only response He met was rejection and scorn, which intensified as He drew near to the end and eventually culminated in the Cross. And He plainly declares that to live in fellowship with Him involves a man in the same hostile treatment at the hands of the same world. The testimony of a life which brings God before the consciousness of those who deliberately plan to live as though He were not cannot but meet with opposition. For it convicts men of selfishness and sin as nothing else can do. The hostility of the world to Christ and His disciples is deep-rooted in human pride.

We are not to refuse, nor yet to seek to avoid this outcome of loyal faith. Still less are we to make a cross for ourselves. The Master enjoins patient submission, and bids us "take" up its burden as He did. For the influence of every such cross-bearing life is redemptive.

If the salt have lost his saltness!

CHRIST'S warnings are a vital part of His Gospel. He who "knew what was in man" is always aware of the possibility of failing purpose, waning energy and actual defection. By virtue alone of their union with Him they are to exercise an influence upon the world like that of salt—preventive, preservative, and purifying. Should that vital union, however, become impaired from any cause, this essential quality is lost and life becomes utterly worthless.

Salt may lose its saltness from one of two causes. As every housewife knows, if it is brought into contact with certain other substances it yields its properties and becomes insipid. Just so is it with the Christian life. Its peculiar influence is inevitably forfeited by voluntary contact with things actually condemned or morally doubtful. Positive sin and self-indulgence of course admit of no question in this respect. More subtle, but not less strong in its destructive power, is the spirit of worldliness, which, at first reluctant and half-afraid, becomes tolerant and self-excusing, then casuistically self-justifying, and is ultimately accepted as the normal standard of life without protest. It is in this way that many a disciple has deteriorated into actual worthlessness. On the other hand, salt may lose its saltness by failure of contact. Such is its nature that it only saves its life by imparting it; and, if kept alone, it strangely forfeits its essential qualities. So also is the Christian life. Only by contact with the sin and need of the world can it maintain its own powers. Most serious, too, is the fact that such a process of loss may go on all unconsciously, until some outstanding occasion reveals the deterioration which cannot be atoned for. For there is really no answer to the Master's query, "Wherewith?" except it be in His own word, that "every one shall be salted with fire."

ST. MARK x. 45.

For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

CHRIST is the eternal example of the greatness of the sincere servant. The only one of His sayings which is unrecorded in the Gospels but given to us elsewhere might well be taken as the motto of His life—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." For it was in this spirit, and with this joy set before Him, that He lived and died. And it is this principle and purpose of life which he commends to those who follow Him.

How indiscriminate He was in the exercise of His ministry! It is comparatively easy to serve those who are thankful and responsive in their appreciation. The warm glow of their gratitude is at once a compensation and an inspiration. But when motives are misconstrued, efforts suspected, and gifts but grudgingly received—if accepted at all, it is hard indeed to continue cheerfully to seek the good of the churlish and unappreciative. And yet He did. Never did any one receive less encouragement than that with which His efforts were met. Never was generous love so despised, or selfless service so spurned. And never was beneficent purpose so entirely victorious in its independence of the adventitious stimulus of thanks. Had it been otherwise, the mighty work of the world's salvation had never been wrought.

The secret of such a life is in the fact that Christ regarded Himself as having no rights except the right to serve. There was no conflict in Him between the call of opportunity and the claim of dignity. Surrender to the Will of the Father had for ever settled that; while a constant outlook upon the world-need inspired His ceaseless activity. If we would follow Him in such a life, we must first follow Him to the place of surrender, which is also the mount of vision. And He has shown us the pathway thither.

Nothing but leaves.

WE are apt to forget the darkness of the terror of the Lord in the light of His tenderness. The fact that on His way to the Cross He could pause to pronounce such a doom upon the worthless tree, should persuade and stimulate our memory to full apprehension of His perfect character.

It is of the nature of the fig-tree to produce its blossom and fruit before its foliage. Hence the raising of Christ's expectation, and His disappointment. As a picture of profession without piety, and of creed without character, its likeness is self-evident. For there are many whose lives it unerringly represents. Christ comes to them hungering at heart for some fruit of their faith in the form of practical love toward Him, of self-sacrificing service for Him, of supreme desire for His glory. And He is disappointed and saddened at finding none of these things. The leaves of religious observance, or external worship, or correct theology, are all there in luxuriant abundance. But He Who searches hearts looks behind and beyond these for the one attestation of true discipleship—fruit.

Note the significance of the punishment of worthlessness. That which does not fulfil the Divine purpose dies. There is a sin of omission which can only lead to the withdrawal of opportunity and the forfeiture of life. This is the full force of Christ's acted parable, which voices to us all the plainest and tenderest warnings of the love of God. It is as though He can bear with anything except calculated insincerity. For this He has no word except of destructive power. The force of the injunction to reality is unmistakable.

Jesus sat over against the treasury.

OF all the realms of Christian duty that of giving is most frequently invaded and characterized by a spirit of haphazard carelessness. On this account much that is cast into the coffers of God's House is without any real worth. For it is always motive which determines value. How different would our giving be if we realized that Jesus sits over against the treasury to scrutinize the offerers and to appraise their offerings.

His keen eyes of love are indifferent to the ordinary standards by which men compute values. There are some copper coins which shine with a lustre and beauty that mere gold ones never acquire ; for they are burnished by the love they represent. In the Saviour's sight they are both potentially and actually worth far more than all that has been given by mere force of custom or convention. And His esteem is all that matters, both now and eternally.

He measures the extent of all gifts by a twofold standard. Firstly, by *how much sincere affection they represent.* No one offers his whole living to the Lord except as an expression of the great love of one who has been much forgiven. Then, also, He looks at *how much is left* when the gift has been made. This is the searching test which determines His opinion of our offerings. Are they actually representative of the surrender of the entire possession of life, or are they but a pittance in comparison with the larger overplus which we regard as our own ? For their proportion unerringly records the esteem in which we hold Him,—and are held.

When ye shall see the abomination of desolation . . . flee to the mountains.

THERE is a place of refuge for the people of God when all around is in chaos. The march of events sooner or later brings stern tests to faith, when clouds gather and every prospect is filled with anxiety. Under these circumstances, from which none of us can entirely escape, the only available and sufficient resource is in communion with God. When the smoke of battle fills the valleys so that we can discern nothing clearly, then we must betake us to the mountain. For there the air is clear and the view unhindered. From thence we can look out on life without fearfulness. And there is renewed our confidence in God's faithfulness as the ultimate security of our lives.

This injunction Christ exemplified in His own life. He was ever betaking Himself to the mountain, that in fellowship with the Father He might be reinvigorated for life amid the scenes of sin and sorrow. And this is the only way of power for us all.

It is no counsel of cowardice which Christ enjoins when He says "Flee." It often takes courage of a higher order to face God than to face life—especially when the "abomination of desolation" is the direct consequence of personal sin. At such times the mountain has its terrors beyond anything that the plain holds; and on its heights the sorest controversy of all must be settled. But it is in the adjustment and cultivation of relationship with Heaven that we are alone prepared to shed light upon the darkness of that other land in which our days must be passed.

Where is My guest-chamber?

THE request which the disciples were instructed to make of their anonymous and hitherto unrecognized fellow-disciple has a significant meaning to us all. For Christ is always saying to men: "If you believe in Me, you belong to Me. If you believe that I have redeemed you with My precious Blood, then yield to Me the life which is rightly Mine." This is the real inwardness of the demand which comes to us again and again,—"Where is My guest-chamber?" And our answer is the attestation of the reality or unreality of our faith.

Christ's acceptance and use of this guest-chamber shows that its owner had done an infinitely bigger thing than he had imagined when he gave it up to the use of the Master. One moment it was just the ordinary guest-room of a Jewish house; the next it was the throne-room of the King of kings. In that room the Lord Jesus took the common cups and plates which formed part of its furnishing and made them the vessels of the First Sacrament! To that same room also He came again after His resurrection, and from thence he sent His disciples into all the world to preach the Gospel. Upon them, as they gathered there after His departure, He sent the Spirit at Pentecost. That room became the most God-used room the world has ever known.

So, too, it is with our lives. Christ takes that which we yield to Him and multiplies its use beyond anything we have thought possible. No guest-chamber is offered to Him with all the sincerity of a loving heart which He does not accept, and occupy, and use.

He saved others; himself he cannot save.

THIS mocking taunt of Christ's foes has become the triumphant Evangel of His friends. It was meant to express contempt for His weakness as He hung upon the Cross. In reality it proclaims His power for all time; for it declares the governing principle of ever redemptive force. Blessing to others can only flow through an entirely unselfish life. Salvation is ever the fruit of sacrifice. A life laid down is always the price at which lives are lifted up. In this His enemies spoke more truly than they were aware.

How unerringly do all the temporary and local events of the Saviour's supreme Sacrifice set forth His unspeakable love. Every incident is like a lens which brings more clearly into view the glory of His patience, His tenderness, and His humility. The power of the Godhead is never seen in such greatness as when so restrained; and nothing exhibits Christ's ability to save men to the uttermost as does His voluntary inability to save Himself.

And in this, as in all things, Christ is the Example and Forerunner of His people. They, too, cannot save others except as they are willing to lose their own lives. Each redeemed man is as a corn of wheat. He may "abide alone" if he will, living for himself and seeking mainly his own good, until every undeveloped possibility rises up to condemn him for ever. Or he may "bring forth much fruit" by yielding himself to God for the service of others. And it is to this use of life that the Saviour inspires all who follow Him. What a record for any man's enemies to be compelled to declare of him: "He saved others!"

He appeared in another form.

AMONGST the many great declarations of the Resurrection none is more significant than that of Christ's unrestricted power of appearance and approach to men. Hitherto in the days of His flesh He bore one sacred form which did not vary. Now He is no longer confined in any national, or local, or social characteristic. In His risen life He Who is indispensable to the life of all men appears and appeals to them according to their widely differing circumstance.

This is the explanation of the innumerable variety of men's experience of Him. Some of His disciples come to know Him as the Living One in the garden; some through the fellowship of the upper-room; some in the toil of their calling on the sea-shore; and others in the intercourse of the common highway. But though He appears in varying forms it is always with unvarying meaning. His purpose is unchanged though His presence may be disguised; for it is always to heal, to help, to hearten, and to hallow that He draws near. There are twelve gates to the City, and every one of them is a pearl.

The greatest tragedy of life is that mere second causes should be allowed to hide Him. For He comes in every promise of new hope, every dawning of new ideal, every imperative of new duty, every stress of new temptation, and every bitterness of new sorrow. And He is Himself the interpretation of each. Let us not miss Him as He assumes "another form" than that in which we have always conceived Him, lest we fail of the manifold wisdom and grace of God.

Great in the sight of the Lord.

GREATNESS is a matter about which there exists much misconception, for men's standards, by which it is measured, vary considerably. To be "great in the sight of the Lord" is, after all, the only greatness which matters, for it alone endures.

John the Baptist was great in the utter sincerity of his consecration to the Will of God. The rugged prophet of the desert, with his scorn of the merely superficial and conventional, stands out boldly as one who never counted the cost to himself of entire faithfulness. The petty honours of the world, its fleeting smiles and frowns, concerned him not at all. A whole-souled purpose of fulfilling his mission and of declaring the Word of God to a forgetful people dominated him. True greatness is compact of utter independence and unmixed integrity,—as witness his attitude toward Herod.

John was great also in the entire self-effacement which marked his life. In the presence of Him Whom he came to announce, he shrank into glad obscurity. The herald's work was accomplished when the King arrived. And with untroubled heart he saw his own followers attach themselves to the One Whom he also followed. It is the mark of true greatness in any servant of Christ that he decreases as Christ increases, and that he consecrates all his strength to the glad task of summoning men to "Behold the Lamb of God."

But let us not be forgetful, that such an one died ignominiously in a prison. For it is ever the world's recognition and reward of men whom the Lord terms great to reject and despise them.

Let us go now even unto Bethlehem.

IF the Gospel mirror be broken into a thousand fragments each one still mirrors in itself a reflection of Christ. In this way the first Christmas Day is a miniature of His whole life and a prophecy of all that should come to be the record of His redemptive work.

For here is the manifestation of everlasting love in the Father's gift and in the Son's grace. Here is the Word made flesh. Prophecy has become power; language has assumed life; love has planned and love has stooped. This is the Evangel of the manger, which all His subsequent life unfolds; and it shines out against a background of gloom—the shadow of the world's rejection. For even the life of the helpless Babe is sought by a ruthless foe. The borrowed cradle foretells the borrowed tomb of the Man Who should one day die for the sins of His own rejectors.

Here, too, is the worship and consecration of believing hearts. For here the rich and poor, the wise and unlearned, meet together in common fellowship. Already He draws all men to Him and changes life for them. The rich pour out their treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, at His feet. The poor leave the yet greater treasure of their devotion, and go forth to proclaim Him in the testimony of captured hearts. Bethlehem becomes to them all the starting-point of a new life. From henceforth they are not their own.

How much do we need to urge one upon another this Gospel of pilgrimage: "Let us go now even unto Bethlehem!" To us all it means the pilgrimage of the sinful way. Along the track of our own failures we must make our way, through the wreckage of our own ideals and vows, to the feet of the lowly Jesus; there to find in Him both rest and renewal. From thence alone do we go out to "walk in the light, even as He is in the light."

Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased.

THE importance of the heavenly Voice is in the light which it casts upon the previous silent years of Christ's life. He had lived the quiet uneventful life of a peasant-carpenter amid the hills of Galilee, doing ordinary duties and illuminating the village homestead with the light of His gracious presence. He had entered into the common brotherhood of toil; and He had tasted something of the poverty and restriction in which the lives of the greatest number of His people in all ages have been passed. He had lived, too, amid frankly unsympathetic relations, some of whom, at least, were incapable of appreciating His ideals or of recognizing His claims. His was just an ordinary life, God-fearing and man-loving, with nothing of startling event or adventure to break its monotony. Yet in these common-place circumstances He had so lived as to secure the approval of the Heavenly Father. Every detail of life had been undertaken as in His sight and every relationship sustained as in His Will.

What an inspiration is this to those of us who have to live in narrow and cabined surroundings, bound to duties seemingly out of proportion to our spiritual endowments. The knowledge that these things, in which our lot strangely resembles His in Nazareth, furnish us with all that is necessary for pleasing God, is a sanctifying inspiration. For He is not hard to please; but we must give ourselves wholly to His service as did our Brother and Master.

To Nazareth, where He had been brought up.

THE pathway of spiritual blessing always heads in the same direction. Every special season of fellowship with God, every new experience of His grace, and every fresh enduement of power, leads on to life in the sphere of the commonplace. Nazareth, to Christ and to His followers also, signifies the ordinary life with its demands and duties, its relationships and responsibilities, which none can rightly avoid. It is the most difficult sphere of all; for it is the place where we are best known, where our failures are least excused, and where our ideals not infrequently meet with little sympathy.

Christ's return to Nazareth was obviously with the intent to make the Word of God intelligible to the people with whom He had companied during all the previous years. In the power of the Spirit He went back to them to make His first declaration of Messiahship, and to open to them the spiritual meaning and value of the Scriptures they already knew in the letter only. In His hand the old rod budded and the familiar words were vitalized, until ere long the men of Nazareth were confronted with the plain issues which are always set before those to whom the Word of God comes in power.

In the same way life opens out into the service of the Kingdom for each one who, like Him, has realized the secrets of personal victory and sufficiency. Blessing to the people of Nazareth is the interpretation of the Divine appointment under which so many of His servants are compelled to abide there; even though, as with the Lord Himself, that service may sometimes lead but to entire rejection.

New wine into old bottles.

IN the double parable of new cloth on an old garment, and new wine in old bottles, Christ describes both His own work and the character also of the gifts with which He blesses those who come to Him. He came to clothe men with a new garment and to satisfy them also with a new and abiding stimulation. And both garment and wine are unique and essential.

He imparts a new force of life which is like new wine with all its native qualities of expansion, fermentation, and disruption. Its form and action cannot be governed by precedent. The man who has come to know Christ must express his grateful love in original manner. Such an one will obey, and suffer, and labour to the uttermost ; not because of any external imperative, but by reason of love's inner constraint. There is an imperiousness in the Divine life which, like new wine, demands new bottles. It cannot suffer the bondage of the ordinary and conventional order.

Under this figure Christ warns the individual and the Church alike against the possible double loss of both wine and vessels. For no tragedy is greater than that of hindered or ultimately lost enthusiasms, which are seldom recoverable. Herein is the peril of the man or the Church, who while desiring new life is yet unwilling for the necessary reconstruction of that in which it is to be contained and expressed. And this principle is of wide application in many directions. To understand it arightly removes the emphasis of life from things non-essential to things vital. For after all, the size and shape of the bottle is as nothing compared to the precious content ; and only as we recognize this can we minister as representatives of the Lord.

Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

THERE is nothing of mere sentiment or theory about Christ's reign in the surrendered heart. It is an entirely practical matter extending to every detail and embracing every duty of our lives. "Whatsoever He saith," solves for us every question, cuts the Gordian knot of every difficulty, and shows us the way out of every strait place. And in so recognizing Him all His power becomes available for life and service. This is the only sufficient dynamic for His people.

It is not enough to hold correct opinions regarding Him, nor to use correct phraseology about Him. It is not enough to wear His livery and to throng His courts. The one proof of reality is obedience, which differentiates His people from the world. Instead of the fashions and conventions by which the world is swayed, "the things that I say" are of supreme and unquestioned authority to them. As they go on with the Master His servants soon cease to find favour with the multitude.

This life of reinforced obedience assures both a fulfilment of His purpose amongst men and the discipline and preparation of His disciples for the eternal service which awaits them. For did He not say that entrance to the Heavenly Kingdom is denied to those who merely say "Lord, Lord," and is awarded only to those who do the Will of the Father as He has disclosed it? And no one who sincerely desires to do that holy Will need be in any doubt as to its requirements. It is no part of God's interest in men to make His wishes obscure.

Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.

ONE of the commonest perils of the Christian life is that of being offended in Christ. The fellowship to which He calls inevitably inspires a constant new and humiliating discovery of self, an unvarying disturbance of established order as His Will corrects our own, and a ceaseless effort to attain, as followers, to the ideal which He our Forerunner has set before us. It is always perilously possible, by lagging behind or turning aside from the compelling guidances of His companionship, to put ourselves unconsciously but actually far out of touch with Him.

It is surely the most startling of all Christ's warnings that men should find any possible occasion of stumbling in Him. We are prepared to find it in the world, in the opposition of the devil, in the proven insincerity of others—but in Him! And yet who is without experience of some disappointment of hope, some failure of expectation, the weariness of an unanswered prayer or the ache of a crushed heart which seems to evoke no sympathetic answer from the Lord? And who does not know how all this generates an unspoken and almost unspeakable distrust, a feeling that we have not been treated quite fairly, which develops in time into actual resentment, until His yoke becomes positively irksome and we even challenge His right to control our lives? Sooner or later, if unchecked, this spirit ends in secret repudiation of His lordship and often in renunciation of all spiritual hopes and aims.

From such small beginnings of distrust do spiritual failures grow. To resist them steadfastly in faith is the life-conflict which is fraught with the blessedness of the unoffended.

That which he seemeth to have.

THERE is a law which governs the permanence of all things in the moral and spiritual realms of life, as indeed on other planes also. The real, alone, is abiding. The unreal is only transient. The Saviour is not here declaiming against positive hypocrisy, but is rather warning those who are in danger of self-deception. He never encourages morbid introspection ; but there is a time when self-examination is entirely necessary. And it is to such honest self-inspection that Christ summons His disciples by these words.

Life is made up of occasions of test. There come to all men tests of duty and crises of spiritual need in which the reality of faith, and strength, and courage is tested. If these qualities have hitherto been but an imagined possession, or an adopted pose, the pressure of such crisis hours will completely sweep them away. Like the acid of the assayer, such experiences reveal the quality of the metal and unerringly detect the true gold and the merely gilded.

It is certain too, that a man's seeming possessions are taken from him when face to face with death. When on the threshold of the King's presence-chamber it is difficult for any man to continue to deceive himself. And if this is true of the portal, what can be said of the Judgment-Seat ? Reality alone will endure the trial of the revealing fire, when all "the wood, hay, and stubble" which have been painted to represent "gold, silver, and precious stones" shall be consumed.

In the face of these things, how important it is that we assure ourselves as to the reality of our hold upon the things of abiding worth.

Ashamed of Me and of my words.

ONE of the prominent notes in the harmony of Christ's teaching is that saving relationship with Him is in the nature of the case visible. The most pitiful of all sights is that of professed discipleship which is yet overmastered by some false shame. For of all things this is the greatest deterrent of moral and spiritual progress. Its cause is always difficult to analyse, for it is commonly in such entire contradiction to other qualities obviously possessed. How many there are who are neither ignorant nor careless regarding Christ's claims, who are not without admiration of Him, who are by no means prayerless in their own hours of need, but who nevertheless fail to identify themselves with Him in a courageous and unmistakable allegiance. They are obviously under the power of some consideration stronger than that of conscience and of Christ.

Christ never threatens men, even when their faults are those of moral cowardice—the most inexcusable of all. But He does frankly reveal the ultimate issue of such an attitude toward Himself. Projected into eternity, which is the true test of every action, He declares the solemn fact that retribution is cast in the mould of its own sin. Our shame of Him will then be visited by His eternal shame of us.

How blessed is the Evangel which declares Christ's power to deliver us both from blame before God and from shame before men. The one who knows Him thus simply must sing : " I am not ashamed, for I am persuaded ! "

ST. LUKE x. 37.

Go and do thou likewise.

CHRIST'S story of the Good Samaritan is appropriate to every age, illustrating as it does the kind of life which Christ commends and commands. It voices His condemnation of the elaborate religious profession which is divorced from human pity, and contrasts the relative values of creed and conduct, doctrine and duty, in terms so vivid as to arrest the attention of all.

Under Christ's illumination the conduct of the Samaritan has become for all time the pattern of the Christian life. For the opportunity which he seized of ministering to one in need is continually recurring in one form or another in a world where men are constantly falling by the wayside. Those who are self-absorbed are always unable to recognize the voice of God in the cry of human need. Such are a standing contradiction of their own profession. Those whose lives are consecrated to Him Whom they love are inspired to quick recognition and selfless service. And such are in themselves a confirmation by which the world is convinced of the reality of Christ.

Some service is only rendered under stress of compulsion. Its voice is: "I must"; and invariably even its best deed lacks all that could make it of value. Other service is rendered under the constraint of duty. Its voice is: "I ought." This is admittedly an advance; but by no means can the one who is thus spurred ever realize either the joy or the effectiveness of the true ministry. Then there is service of which love alone is the impulse. Its voice is: "I may." It regards obligation as privilege, and looks upon every opportunity to serve as an honour. It gives without stint and places no restrictions upon its sacrifices. And it is to this latter that Christ commits His followers when He bids them emulate the anonymous Samaritan. For He Himself is the Model.

A greater than Solomon is here.

LOOKED at superficially how unlikely does Christ's claim appear! For the contrast between Solomon's wealth and Christ's poverty, between his splendour and Christ's insignificance, between his kingship and Christ's homelessness, is almost staggering. Yet how completely justified is this declaration in the light of all that Christ has done, and is.

He is greater than Solomon *as a Teacher*.—His view of life is truer and worthier. Solomon certainly inculcates high ethical standards, but he records also the testimony of a disillusioned and disappointed man. Mere maxims do not make for morality, nor proverbs for purity. The man who evidenced such keen insight into the facts of life is the one whose last word records that "all is vanity." How different from this is the teaching of Christ! He both broadens the basis of sin and elevates the standard of holiness beyond anything that Solomon conceived. And yet He does not thereby cast men down to despair; for the theoretic perfection of His Word is always advanced along with its dynamic strength.

Christ is greater than Solomon also *as a Builder*.—While Solomon's greatest achievement was the building of the Temple, Christ builds living temples. From the quarry of sin He rescues men, shaping and refining them by His Spirit and thus making them meet for the Divine indwelling. Living temples of the Holy Ghost are the attestation of Christ's transcendent greatness. If Solomon could evoke the admiration of Sheba's queen, how much more should Christ inspire us to devoted and loyal obedience.

The very hairs of your head are all numbered.

THIS is an item of Christ's figurative teaching which brings both comfort and uplift to His people, declaring as it does the Divine ordering of life's smallest trifles. Its importance is readily recognized in the fact that life for most people consists mainly of an aggregation of little things, of which experience attests the power and influence. Christ makes it abundantly plain that bigness and greatness are not to be confused; and thus interprets life to us all. The inference of His statement is that in life's affairs size and strength are sometimes strangely disproportionate. Indeed, the story of our greatest joys and sorrows commonly has its beginning in something which at the time seems entirely negligible. How good it is to know that God cares for the smallest things that concern His children, and invites them to seek His counsel and control about them all. Life's minutiæ are love's ministry.

In this heartening declaration there is surely an injunction also that if God is careful for the small matters of our lives so also must we be. And herein lies the severest discipline of the soul. The small irritations of spirit, the unheralded opportunities of service, the hasty thoughtlessness of speech or action, and the unseen occasions of self-sacrifice which are in every life, demand constant vigilance and the exercise of sensitive obedience. For these are the trifles which go to make up that Christian character which is our strongest witness before the world and His most powerful authentication.

Journeying toward Jerusalem.

CHRIST'S last journey from Galilee to Calvary is illustrative of His whole life. Prophecy had declared of Him that His face should be set as a flint, and so indeed it was. With His clear prevision of the Cross and His natural shrinking from the Cup there characterizes His life a steady determination to do the Will of God despite every dissuasion. His consecrated resolve, with its disregard of all easy compromise, sets Him forth for all time in the matchless beauty of Divine love. His eye saw not only the dark thunder-cloud which hung over Jerusalem as He directed His way thither, and which He knew must break in storm upon Him, but also the light of the world's redemption. Every mile of that journey proclaims His inspiring consciousness of the worth of sinful souls.

As He journeyed, His disciples followed Him; and this fact, too, is a parable of life. For thus He is ever leading His people out into redemptive service which can only be accomplished by their entire self-sacrifice. To follow in His steps is to cultivate the high determination of subordinating everything to the fulfilment of the purpose to which He inspires. As with Him, so with us also, temptations to turn aside to an easier pathway abound. But when faithfulness is most difficult it is most necessary; for its issues are immeasurable. All the strength of courage and continuance which it demands are unfailingly ministered to those who maintain unbroken fellowship of purpose and aim with their Lord and Leader.

Counteth the cost.

CHRIST is always content to call out the heroic latent in every man, and to base His appeal for faith and consecration, not on the ease but on the difficulty and worthiness of life in the Will of God. Hence it is that He deprecates rash and ill-considered discipleship, and urges that each one should first count the cost before identifying himself with Him. In His conception life is both a building and a battle. To set out upon it in either of these forms, without considering well the available resources for completion of the one and conquest in the other, is to court disaster.

How different in this Christ is from all other causes which seek the suffrages of men's lives! Think, for instance, of the way in which sin disguises the cost. The last counsel it ever gives when offering its seductive delights is as to its own consequence. Its harvest is invariably hidden in the delights of the seed-sowing; and consequently men give themselves over to unworthiness with never a thought of the day of reckoning. Christ seeks deliberate and calculated loyalty as the only guarantee of future steadfastness. He declares that the cost of fellowship with Himself is nothing less than a complete renunciation of sin, an entire surrender of self, and an open declaration of faith before the world. Those who are prepared for this are gladly welcomed to His company and appointed to His service. All the history of His Church records this fact—that it is those who do first count the cost, and then cast in their lot with Him, who subsequently exhibit magnificent recklessness in the carrying out of His Will. To them no opposition comes as a surprise and no personal affront is a deterrent. For it is with full consciousness of such that they enlist.

This Man receiveth sinners.

THE testimony of Christ's enemies, if collected, would almost afford us a complete Gospel. Indeed, had we no other record of His life than of those things which His opponents said about Him, we should still know enough of His character, His message, His power, and His love, to draw out our hearts toward Him in trust and obedience. This taunting sneer of the Pharisees has long since become the boast of His people. The fact that "He receiveth sinners and eateth with them" is His supreme attractiveness.

Part of the sweet harmony of the Gospel is that while Christ came with a mission for all He came also with a message to each. He did not deal with evil in the mass but in the man. He did not attack the problem of sin so much as the problem of the sinner; and of such He never despaired of the worst. The natural order in the world of men and events proclaims the survival of the fittest as the law of life. In complete contradiction Christ puts the salvation of the unfittest in the forefront of His programme.

He receives sinners into fellowship by first of all creating in them a moral and spiritual correspondence with Himself. There is nothing in any man, whose sin is yet upon him, which qualifies him for such holy companionship. The miracle of the new birth must recreate deteriorated capacities, repair devastated moral powers, and inspire new aims, before the Saviour and the sinner actually become one. And of this miracle He alone is the doer in the life of "whosoever will."

St. Luke xvi. 13.

Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

OF all Christ's sayings this is perhaps the one to which men in all ages have paid the least heed. He emphatically declares that in order to serve and please God a man must be voluntarily free from the strong bondage of material things. The conflicting claims of God and of earthly riches must be settled at the very beginning. In Himself Christ exemplified this principle and for all time set us an example of utter independence of the world, while at the same time devoting Himself to its highest and eternal interests. In this, as in all things else, "it is enough for the servant to be as his Lord."

Nothing is more evident than the fact that men—even men of professed faith—do become ensnared and enslaved by mammon. Almost all the struggles of life have as their object its acquisition or its retention. Of all things certain in our common life, nothing is more so than the fact that those who serve mammon must do it with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. It is not hard to recognize also that such become its bond-slaves. For earthly treasure is above all things tyrannical. The grip of gold upon men's hearts is unrelenting.

This is the reason for Christ's drastic prohibition. Mammon demands the place which can only rightly be given to God. Its claims are so completely at variance with the call of the highest as to render it entirely impossible for any man to make a success in both realms. What we must desire and most earnestly strive after is either our assurance of sonship or our condemnation.

Remember Lot's wife.

CHRIST'S emphatic reminder of the peril of unreality is like a buoy placed over a dangerous reef for the warning of unwary navigators. The story is one of sin and its unimagined consequence, of grace and its unappreciated gifts, of love and its unavailing efforts. Despite all that Divine power did to secure her salvation, Lot's wife is for ever a warning example of unbelief. Out of heart-agreement with God's proclaimed wrath on Sodom's sin, and with but slight regard for His proffered mercy, her heart was really in the city along with her imperilled possessions. Her punishment is just an illustration of the sudden and unexpected withdrawal of opportunity which comes upon some, and of the hardening of heart and conscience which comes upon all in similar case.

This injunction to "remember Lot's wife" is directed toward those who, like her, would save more than themselves. It warns those who are trying to make the best of both worlds, but who, in the attempt, fail to keep step with the Angel-messengers of God. The awful possibility of being almost saved and yet entirely lost is one about which Christ leaves no man in uncertainty. It is safer to toy with forked-lightning than to trifle with the revealed Will of God. None can play fast and loose with the tremendous facts of sin, and judgment, and grace, without jeopardizing thereby their own souls. To have the peril of unbelief is to have also the fear of God before our eyes.

God be merciful to me a sinner.

THE startling contrast between the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican furnishes an indication of Christ's standard of values as applied to the most important realm of men's lives—their approach to God. For some men God can do nothing. Their attitude of heart toward Him, their self-sufficiency and self-complacency, ward off the beneficent intentions of His grace. As in Nature the action of some streams tends to turn living objects into stone, so does the stream of unfelt and self-seeking praying petrify the soul of its offerer. Many a man courts—and meets his own destruction in the Temple. The peril is one from which none of us is immune.

How simple as to form and direct as to request is the prayer of the publican. Standing "afar off," in the consciousness of the sin which separated him from God, he realized that he was yet alone with Him. But he has already come to know that the span of mercy bridges the sin-gulf; and he is confident that even such an one as he is may safely venture across. On its further side the Father awaits him with a welcome which is unmixed with any reproach. From its strengthening assurance the man goes down to his house to declare what God has done for him. He has learned by an experience which nothing can modify that sin confessed is sin covered, and that life humbled is life exalted. This is sufficient inspiration for the long moral conflict that is yet before him. Such prayer is the one gateway to the life victorious and beautiful, alike for him and for us. It demands our stooping. But it ensures our salvation.

To-day I must abide at thy house.

FOR one day only did Christ visit Jericho as He pursued His way toward Calvary. A single dew-drop may mirror a star as clearly as does an ocean; and any one of Christ's days—and this one in particular—reveals the grace of God as truly as does His whole life.

How entirely does His Evangel transcend any man's highest desires. Zacchæus would have been well content to catch a passing glimpse of Him. He is all unconscious that behind his immediate thought Christ had already detected something deeper and worthier. And he does not know that He has come to Jericho for the express purpose of blessing him. There are two searchers, each looking for the other, when any man begins to seek Christ. The result of such mutual desire is never in doubt.

To what heights does Christ lift those who are responsive to His call, who make their decision to obey Him without fear before all beholders. For He identifies Himself with them and at once shares the responsibilities to which in that hour they pledge themselves. Having come into the heart He proceeds to come into the home, where His presence soon reveals all that is out of harmony with the requirements of Divine holiness. And with this creation of self-consciousness comes the realization of His sufficient assistance. Zacchæus—and his present-day successors—can do all things he must do through the strength of his new-found Saviour. Such a partnership of power alone secures the costly cleansing of any life from its moral discrepancies. The indwelling Christ Himself makes the heart meet for His own habitation.

Render . . . unto God the things that be God's.

THE truth of the Divine Fatherhood, which is the centre of Christ's message, implies that men belong wholly to God and that therefore it is incumbent upon every one to yield to Him all that with which life is endued and entrusted.

Every capacity of the soul is stamped with God's image and superscription. As the name upon a coin denotes its nominal possession by the sovereign, so the stamp of God's creation and ownership is upon every human power and aptitude. Sin may dim but it can never wholly deface this attestation of God's crown-right. Hence it is that no man can be entirely true to himself who withholds from God's use any part of his life.

Such a relationship with God as Christ enjoins is never entered upon in any mere haphazard way. To render unto God the things which are His involves a very definite and considered action on the part of every one of us. That action develops into an attitude which must be daily and hourly maintained. The yielded soul constantly and practically acknowledges that he is not his own, but is "bought with a price." Life on any lower plane fails of its purpose. This, indeed, is the tragedy of many an enlightened man—that consecration does not wait upon conviction, and that loyalty of heart is not the outcome of light from Heaven. Such men may rise to great height in the court of Cæsar. In the Kingdom of God they simply have no existence.

Take heed to yourselves.

THE mysterious conflict between ideals and tendencies, and the perplexing contrast between intentions and instabilities, as they exist even in His most ardent followers, are all well known to Christ. He never discourages the warm impulses of affection, nor despises the courage which would do and dare for Him. He does, however, frankly endeavour to create a consciousness of personal insufficiency which shall at all times drive His people to Himself.

In view of the certainty of His coming again, and of the uncertainty also which surrounds that day, He bids us exercise watchful vigilance over ourselves. It almost seems incongruous, in such a connexion, to speak as He does of eating and drinking as among the causes liable to involve men in the condemnation of unreadiness. And yet it is just the things of the body which most often dull the sensibilities of the soul. Even the hearts of Christian men may become so overcharged with these things as to render them prisoners of their own lower nature. For God does not shift from any man the responsibility of choice and of will. There are details of life the ordering of which He leaves entirely to the loyalty of His servants, though never without giving them clear and ample direction. How earnestly should we regard these words of Christ, questioning ourselves as to the supreme dominance under which we live! Are the things of the body uppermost, or the things of the spirit? Are we walking after the desires of the flesh, or after the mind of God? Are we devoted to the pleasures of sin, or to the service of our Lord? The answer which conscience unerringly gives to the man who thus sincerely questions with himself, is the truest attestation of his readiness for the Return of the King.

I have prayed for thee.

TEMPTATION is not prevented by Divine love just because it is entirely necessary to our truest life. The permissive Will of God is disclosed behind the malignant purpose of the Adversary who would sift us with the intent of destroying the wheat and saving the chaff. God allows temptation to reach His children with the introverted purpose of destroying the chaff and saving the wheat. Those tempers, habits, and dispositions which are no part of the new life, we can only lose by the sifting which God permits. The process is at once painful and perplexing; and there is real danger lest faith falls under it. What an inspiration to the tempted and mystified believer is Christ's assurance of prayer on his personal behalf.

Christ's supplication for His tempted people is not to be understood as a repetition of request but as the unceasing presentation of His propitiation. In His Sacrifice, once offered, He has fulfilled the condition on which God's grace henceforth flows to men through Himself as the channel. And at the Throne of Grace, He ever pleads the merit of His Blood on behalf of His beloved.

Christ looks upon every life as a grain of wheat in view of its potential harvest. His concern is that nothing of this should be lost; and His intercession is a silent partnership of power to this end. For beyond the experience of victory and development, which is the ideal outcome of temptation, there lies a ministry of strength-giving to other tempted and suffering lives. It is that the man of God may be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" that Christ unceasingly prays for us. Let us therefore endeavour to establish others in this consciousness, and ever bind to ourselves His strengthening word "I have prayed for thee."

He answered him nothing.

NO recorded tragedy is greater than the silence of Christ toward the man who questioned Him in the supreme hour of His life. How strangely different it is from His ready conversation with men of all kinds and classes as He companied with them. No leper so loathsome, no fallen woman so vile, no outcast so sunken, but Christ speaks to them the "wonderful words of Life." Here, however, on the throne is one whose entire condemnation is in the fact that Christ refused to speak. For Herod's mind had by this time become utterly reprobate. He who knew the right had deliberately refused it; and hence his sin remained. Slowly but surely deterioration of character and atrophy of moral nature had set in. Even his questions to the Lord reveal his lost capacity for holiness and the entire vitiation of all his springs of thought. To such a man Christ has nothing to say. He will not speak to him because there is nothing to appeal to.

Let it be noted that Christ's silence is not merely because Herod had sinned; else would He be silent to every one of us as we cry to Him. One word of real confession and repentance had secured even for Herod the fulness of His pardoning mercy. But he is joined to his idols and Christ lets him alone. What warning is this strange silence of the Son of God to us all! Deaf ears make a dumb Christ. Sin when it has finished bringeth forth death;—and there is no point in Christ's speech to such an one. Well may we pray, "Be not silent to me, O Lord, lest I become like them that go down into the pit."

Peace be unto you.

"PEACE" is the first word of the Lord's risen life and the last word of His departing benediction. For all time it expresses the paradox of the Christian life, which though lived amid endless agitation and committed to ceaseless conflict is yet itself unruffled and untroubled. The peace which Christ bequeaths is that which was seen in His own life. Its blessedness is the result not of the absence of loss or sorrow but of the unchanging presence of God. It is the heavenly heart's-ease whose perfume unmistakably identifies the followers of Christ amid the dust and bustle of the unresting throngs in the world's life.

As with the disciples in the upper-room with its locked doors, so too with us, peace may be lost by doubt, or fear, or preoccupation. Already in the days that were gone Christ had spoken peace to their hearts; but now their assurance of its power had left them. The startling events of that memorable week, when all the waves and billows of sorrow had gone over them, had wellnigh driven them from their moorings. Nervous apprehension of certain opposition in the immediate future had undone them. In such a case the mere mention of peace seems a mockery,—were it not Jesus Himself Who appeared speaking the old sweet greeting to assure them that events cannot alter facts. For He, too, had suffered far more than they. Yet He is still able to give to others the peace which He Himself had never lost. His is the peace of the triumphant Victor. He bestows it as part of their enduement on those who are going forth in His name to the conflict.

The Word was made flesh.

PRIOR to Christ's coming the Word of God had already become human speech and writing. In the main, however, men would not listen to it, could not understand it, and did not interpret it. For, as a matter of fact, God cannot be adequately declared in mere utterance and literature. Hence "the Word became flesh" and expressed God in all His human experiences, not by teaching a doctrine but by living a life under ordinary human conditions of pain, disappointment, temptation, and joy. Only thus as He reveals Him can the Infinite become to us the intimate, the Creator become the companion, and the thunder of Law form the deep diapason of the tender harmonies of Love.

In the Incarnation of Christ there is declared the possibility of fellowship between man and God, the restoration of sin-forfeited union. That "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" proclaims the glorious truth that God's thoughts can come into men's minds, that His works can be done by men's hands, and that His affection can be responded to and reflected in men's hearts.

His appearance as a Man amongst men is not merely a truth to be believed but a type also of the life of which He is the Bestower and the Forerunner. For in His followers language must become life and creed must become character. The process of the Christian life is to materialize the spiritual. Under its discipline each man of faith becomes the expression of some thought of God to the world.

St. John ii. 10.

Thou hast kept the good wine until now.

THE story of the village wedding in Cana is a significant illustration of Christ's work among men. His presence, and that of His disciples, doubtless strained the resources of the household. And where He comes there is at first a disconcerting sense of insufficiency and need. But happy is the one who, in that hour of self-discovery, when the wine of life runs short, turns to the Christ of Cana. For He ever makes this consciousness of need the opportunity of showing His power and glory.

The governor at that feast marvelled that the best vintage had been kept until the end of the festivities. In speaking, however, as he did, he was all unconsciously enunciating the principle that seems to govern all Christ's gifts. He is unlike all others in this respect that He always gives the best last. For instance, sin always offers the best wine first and the worst last. First the brightness and pleasure, the good fellowship and self-gratification; but afterward the bitter consequence, the relentless memory, and the unending remorse. All the world's pleasures, too, are keenest at the beginning. But Christ gives "not as the world giveth." It is always His way to lead on from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from glory to glory. With Christ to-morrow is always better than to-day. We journey with Him not toward the night but toward the light. The more we know of Him the fuller is our appreciation of all that He is.

And when the river is past and we gather with Him in the Homeland, it will be to find that our richest earthly joy in His love is entirely outdistanced by the delight of His unveiled presence. We shall find that He has kept the best wine of all until then.

The that doeth truth cometh to the light.

THIS is Christ's comprehensive description of the one who, in union with Him, sets out to live the true life. He describes him as one who "doeth" and not as one who merely believeth the truth. By co-operation of faith and obedience with the Divine purpose he is ever striving to make his life an approximation to Christ's ideal in a world where error rules and darkness holds sway. The constant conflict thus involved demands high communion and a sure confidence.

The translation of his own desires into deeds of goodness is no easy thing for a man; for not only is the opposition of the world a deterring factor, but in himself he finds much to conflict with his purpose. Sometimes the holy vision fades in the dazzling light in which sin presents itself; and only a constant ministry of grace can then enable him to continue in the Truth. But this is secured to him by his determined coming to the light. Daily he must bring his life into the brightness of the Sanctuary, submitting himself to the scrutiny of the eyes of Divine love which are as a flame of fire. Searching and painful though this revelation of self may be, it is the only guarantee of steadfastness. For the light which reveals sin shines also upon its remedy. It can disclose nothing but what the Blood can remove.

From the light it is evident that Christ intends His people to go out into the darkness, and so to live there as to declare unmistakably the dynamic by which alone the life of discipleship is possible.

I have meat to eat that ye know not of.

THE surprise of the disciples on their return to Jacob's Well is easy to understand. An hour before they had left Christ wearied and hungry. Now they find Him refreshed and gladdened and without need of the food they had been at pains to purchase. In doing the Will of the Father in respect of a single sinful soul, He had been renewed. And herein He seeks to train His disciples in the same method of life by imparting the secret of His strength. There is an inter-action of spiritual strength and service, which means that enduement is actually increased by expenditure, when the direction of the effort is the Will of God. His is the Gospel of action, both in exhortation and example. Work is really the staff of life. It is service for God and souls which alone makes the servant strong in patient endurance and knowledge.

We are apt sometimes to imagine that the task to which the Will of God commits us is beyond our powers. As a matter of fact, strength is acquired, not in view of each task but as a result of doing it. Faithfulness in that which is least guarantees power for that which is greatest. How clearly do we see all this in the life of the Lord Himself! He came forth, not to speak of, not to trifle with, and not to be resigned to the Will of God, but to *do* it. In all its variety His life was always lived in one direction—that of the blessing of souls. Each accomplishment in this respect brought to Him a new acquisition of strength for further service of the same sort. In the same banqueting-house of active obedience His disciples likewise eat of the Hidden Manna.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?

HOW startling is Christ's discernment of unbelief, significantly addressed to those whose reputation was for searching the Scriptures. The erection of a false standard—"honour one of another"—and the evasion of a first responsibility—"seek not the honour which cometh from God only"—make them virtual unbelievers, despite their religious observance and zeal for the outward things of worship. Faith, in Christ's meaning—which is the only one that matters—always connotes obedience which is compact of the assent of the mind to a truth, the consent of the will to a programme, and the devotion of the heart to a Person. He conceives the man of faith as first apprehending the Will of God, then proceeding onward in obedience without any concern as to the dissent or criticism of others, and then finding along that pathway self-discipline, brotherhood, service, and the honour which God alone bestows—that of being His representative and messenger to other men.

In challenging as to "how can ye believe?" Christ is in no sense declaiming against the grateful courtesies of life. He is warning men against making the world's favour the objective of their life-aim. The peril of so ordering life as to insure being well spoken of, and to avoid adverse verdicts, is a subtle and dangerous one. For that sort of thing grows; until men come to love the praise of other men more than the praise of God. On the other hand, to love God and to seek after His honour liberates men by its own force from all worldly love and concern. This is the true independence and glorious liberty of His sons.

I am the Bread of Life.

HOW surprising at first sight is Christ's declaration, with its assumption of universal hunger. He takes it for granted that all men are hungry; and on this postulate He announces Himself as the One Who is able to meet their needs. He is constantly seeking to interpret the longings of human souls, which are explicable only in the light of His loving interest.

Hunger is a recurring manifestation of physical health which we all recognize. So also is it in the moral and spiritual realm. Hunger for the highest and truest life is itself a sign of saving relationship with God. This was the first consciousness of the prodigal, who, "when he came to himself," knew himself to be hungry for love and for home. And it is this sense, common to us all, which Christ endeavours to explain and to direct toward Himself. For He is the Divine provision for every hungry soul. He says in effect: "Just as you cannot live without bread, so you cannot truly live without Me."

Under this figure of bread He impresses upon us the necessity of personal appropriation, if we are to derive from Him any benefit of life or strength. For as uneaten bread is perfectly useless to strengthen, so an unappropriated Christ is powerless to save. Just also as we need to eat bread day by day, so is a daily taking of the Saviour's fulness needed if we are to be strengthened by Him for the labours of life. Yesterday's food only serves to make that of to-day necessary. In spiritual as in material things we can only live a day at a time.

If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.

THIS, of all Christ's proclamations, is the one which resolves the difficulty of every honest and sincere seeker. It declares that God reveals Himself to individuals according to their attitude of will, and boldly submits every perplexity to a present and practical test which is available to every man. In effect, Christ says to those who profess a desire to know God: "Do as much as you know, and you shall come to know as much as you desire. Walk in the beam before you, and you shall come to the brightness which is beyond you. According to your sympathetic determinations shall be your spiritual discoveries."

Desires after God may co-exist with much perplexity concerning Him. Such uncertainty may be variously caused; by the seeming overthrow, for instance, of things which hitherto have been taken for granted, or by the impact of new knowledge on old faith, or by the difficulty of reconciling human experiences with Divine assurances. But, however caused, Christ challenges a man's personal sincerity and consistency as the condition of all spiritual knowledge. He declares that in the last analysis everything depends on the attitude of his will. If one honestly desires to do the Will of God, and sets himself resolutely to do it; if he responds to such knowledge as he already possesses, however imperfect it be, leaving all matters not vital in abeyance—Christ declares of him that he shall come to the full knowledge of God which is life eternal.

Neither do I condemn thee.

IN entire contrast to the treatment of the Scribes and Pharisees is that meted out by Christ to the sinful woman. Official religion can only accuse and convict. Divine love makes the fullest allowance for every contributing circumstance and seeks rather the restoration of the sinner than the punishment of her fault. It matters not what are the forces which bring such an one to His feet, nor how entirely is direct punishment merited. Christ has not come to condemn but to save; and in speaking pardon and peace to the crushed and broken soul He is essentially true to Himself and to His mission. That He cares as much as He does, at once invests the sin with awfulness but inspires the sinner with hope.

His attitude toward the accusers is as significant as that toward the accused. Contemptuously silent at first at their effrontery in covering their own sin, while dragging into the light that of the erring woman, He subsequently challenges them with their own guilt to their utter discomfiture. Conscience is always His ally in moral issues, joining with Him in judgment upon all artificial distinctions. Sin covered and unconfessed always drives men from His presence in confusion.

In His pardon of the sinner and His refusal to join in her condemnation, Christ reveals the gladdening fact that the ground of judgment for every man is not the sin he has committed but rather the rejection of Himself—its Divine Remedy. It is on this account that He still utters these gracious words to every stained and contrite one. For the time of condemnation is not yet at hand; nor will be until the opportunity of accepting His pardon has for ever passed away.

One thing I know.

EXPERIENCE is indubitable. Mere opinions and theories are frequently quite unable to withstand the force of argument and the pressure of opposition. What a man has seen, however, with his own eyes, he can never unsee. Though he may fail to convince those who controvert him, his own assurance only deepens with every fresh declaration of that which he knows. Such is the case of the blind man, the story of whose healing strikes such a tender and human note in the Gospel record. Faith in Christ and implicit obedience to His command have been the means whereby the miracle has been effected. The man, hitherto imprisoned in darkness, is liberated in light entirely by the power of the Son of God. That such an event calls attention to Christ, and evokes a hostile demonstration by His foes, is scarcely a cause of wonder; for it is ever so. That it is unable to shake the confidence of the one who is enjoying the glad amaze of a newly-discovered world is likewise not to be wondered at. Such an experience is entirely beyond the reach of all question.

Ultimate and final certainty with regard to Christ has to be sought by each man in the realm of his own life. Where argument fails and logic is insufficient, the victory is ever with the one who can say: "I know!" Ignorant concerning many things he may be, and fragmentary even with regard to Christ may be his knowledge. But the irrefutable proof of His reality and power is in the realm of his own being. There the unspeakable change has been wrought, and of this "one thing" at least he is confident. He may know but in part—yet he knows! His faith stands not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God; and its declaration is a veritable Gospel to those who hear it. For this, indeed, is the knowledge which is power.

I lay down My life, that I may take it again.

IN these words Christ enunciated a principle which in His life and by His death He expanded and illustrated. It is the law of His own being, and that also of His followers, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." There is in the Gospel harmony the plaintive note of redeeming sorrow; but there is also the deep undertone of victorious fulfilment because of voluntary sacrifice.

Christ's death was in no sense a mere object lesson of the love of God without propitiatory significance. Still less was it the inevitable end of a life lived out of touch with the current ideas of the day, and hence but an example of moral heroism. There is something in His simple statement "I lay down My life," which for ever makes it impossible to doubt the voluntariness with which He undertook and carried out the world's redemption.

"The joy which was set before Him," was the anticipated delight of calling forth, by His very sacrifice, such responsive love as should secure for Him undisputed sway over the lives of His loved ones. He laid His life down that He might take it again in other souls. Wherever a sinful heart recognizes Him as Saviour, and gladly receives Him as Sovereign, there He sees of the travail of His soul. And all that may be said in this respect with regard to Him is true also with regard to His followers. Every Christian is in some sense a re-incarnation of His Spirit. Sacrifice as the crown of life is a complete contradiction of the popular ideal; but it is the law of all true discipleship. For it is only by laying it down that life's expansion is assured and its harvest made certain.

Even now.

THERE is perhaps no record of faith more significant and complete than is this word. Martha at the tomb of her brother, full of a grief which was made keener because of the anticipated deliverance which had not come in time, when at last face to face with the Saviour was able from her broken heart to speak this word of triumphant trust. "Even now," on her lips voices the faith by which the dead was ultimately raised.

The difficulties of the present are always those which we feel most keenly. We cannot get away from the tyranny of insistent fact; and it is often harder to believe that God is with us now than to recognize His past mercy or to hope for His future blessing. The problems and ills of the present, seen at close range, appear greater than anything we have ever known. Nor does the fact that these are often part of the harvest of the past make it any easier to regard them with equanimity. Indeed this consciousness renders it the more difficult to realize that "even now," amid the sin-created tangles of life, God is with us to guide, to strengthen, and to bless. And yet life demands nothing less.

God's delays are never denials; and the one who honestly seeks audience with Him, when all is blackest and darkest, always finds power to deliver and to relieve. "Even now," when weakness is most felt, when opposition is most fierce, when temptation is most severe, when enthusiasm is most difficult to arouse, and when need is most pressing—the presence of the Lord means light, and life, and liberty.

Not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also.

MEN raised from the dead are themselves the media for the revelation of God's glory. People who carelessly pass by the offers and claims of the Saviour are always arrested at the sight of one in whom so obviously is His power illustrated. Christ was no stranger to the crowd which gathered at Bethany. Doubtless they had all seen and heard Him in previous days. But the spectacle of a man raised from the dead evoked all their curiosity and wonder. It filled them with something of the awe of the unseen world. With Christ's doctrine and teaching they might be at variance—honestly or dishonestly. But such a manifestation of His power they could neither disregard nor explain away. And so it ever is.

It is in redeemed men that the power of God unto salvation is exhibited to the world. "Ye are my witnesses" is Christ's abiding commission to those whom He has touched into life, and from whom the grave-clothes of sin have been unbound. Each one is an authentication of Him, stating the case for Him beyond all power of contradiction. With what a steadying responsibility does this fact invest our lives. Many who will not hearken directly to Him cannot fail to be arrested if we exhibit before them the evidences of a new life. What a record alike of Lazarus and ourselves is that which declares that "by reason of Him many went away and believed on Jesus"! And what a responsibility should the record of our lives be the reverse of this!

How is the Son of man glorified.

IT is strange that, as the end drew near, and the shadows of the Garden and the Cross were thrown darkly across His path, Christ should declare this to be the hour of His glory. The circumstances are significant and illuminating. The traitorous disciple had just gone out into the night after having received the sop—the Master's last attempt to pierce his soul by the arrow of unchanged love. The little company was then truly of one heart in their devotion to Him, the gold no longer mixed with dross, nor the interest of the new brotherhood vitiated by anything of disloyalty. This, then, is the condition of Christ's glory. When all that is unloving, self-seeking, and faithless is cast out, either of a community or a life, then only is He glorified in His professed followers.

In how many hearts is the Judas spirit predominant! Desire to gain material things is apt to blind men as to the price which must be paid for them. Fascination of the thing sought too often hides the unworthiness of the means adopted for its acquisition. Many an one only acquires his wealth by betraying, as Judas did, the Saviour Whose name he bears. The spirit of the world is at all times utterly opposed to the spirit of Christ; and it is impossible for any to respond to a double dominance. If we would glorify Him Who bought us with His Blood for this very purpose, we must dethrone every idol and cast out every usurper from the kingdom of our inner being. Christ is only glorified when He is the undisputed Master of heart and life.

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?

ACQUAINTANCE with Christ, apart from real heart knowledge of Him, is little short of a tragedy. Nothing breeds self-sufficiency like superficial acquaintance with any great truth; and in our relation with Christ Who is the truth incarnate there is a sort of knowledge which "puffeth up" only to destroy. On the other hand, there is a knowledge which is life eternal toward our personal realization of which all the ministry of God's love is directed.

How fatally easy it is to mistake mere knowledge about Christ for that intimate, close relationship which He describes as truly *knowing* Him. For to know Him as Saviour is to experience deliverance from the practice and power of sin. Where such daily victory is not enjoyed it is obvious that He is not known. To know Him as Friend is to have a sanctifying companionship which lifts the ordinary things of life into the sphere of His pleasure. But where there is little or no love expressed in the deference of choices and pursuits to His desires it is clear that He is unknown in this relationship. Further, to know Him as Lord means an implicit obedience to all that is understood as His Will. Where, however, there is no doing of the things that He says, no manifested sympathy with His aims, He is not really known.

Unwillingness on the part of any to face the consequence of a revised life, such as the knowledge of Christ involves, makes impossible all His further ministry. Satisfied ignorance for ever puts an end to opportunity. It seals the destiny of any man whose self-complacency rules him completely out of the Kingdom.

He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness.

THE Holy Spirit testifies to Christ's followers of His reality, and it is their mission in turn to transmit this testimony to the world. The ultimate objective of the work of the Spirit is the making of Christ known to "the uttermost parts of the earth" through the witness of His disciples. Their inner life and outward activity are to harmonize and keep pace. The success of their service is directly proportioned to the reality of their sanctity. Their preparation, both of heart and message, is the work of the Comforter. But the responsibility, both of attention and obedience, is their own.

In these days, no less than in those immediately following His own, the great need of His people is that of essential power. Although its hostility now assumes more cultured and refined forms than of old, the world is actually as much opposed to Christ as it ever was. On this account the need of clear and undaunted testimony to His grace and power cannot be over-estimated. If the Church does not conquer the world by her witness it is certain that the world will conquer the Church by her seductions. And it is for this supreme work of bearing witness to Christ that the promises concerning the Comforter were given. And they are still available.

The pre-requisite qualification for bearing effective witness is personal knowledge gained by experience,—such experience as that into which the Holy Spirit daily brings the willing soul. Heart-attention to His insistent testimony of Christ is the open secret of strength for service.

When he is come.

MISCONCEPTION as to the significance of His title is to a large extent responsible for obscuring the real issues of the work of the Spirit. For the "Comforter" does not merely denote the One Who ministers sympathy but the One also Who imparts strength. He it is Who not only brings pity in sorrow but power in service. The objective of His ministry is the convincing of the world with regard to the sufficiency of the Saviour, and its conviction with regard to its attitude toward Him. His Atonement and all that that mysterious transaction comprehends, His Advocacy and all that His presence at the Throne means, His Advent and all that His glorious Appearing promises—these are the themes upon which the Holy Spirit bases His testimony.

It must be noted that this His mission is accomplished through the Church, both in her corporate life and her individual membership. The testimony of changed lives, the witness of transformed tempers, the proof afforded by renewed desires and recovered powers, is incontrovertible. It is by seeing what Christ has done that men are convinced of His claims. To be controlled, strengthened, and guided by the Holy Ghost is to be endued with effective power for setting forth Christ convincingly. Such faithful witness without the camp always necessitates faithful worship within the veil. There the active ministries of the Spirit are renewed to the sincere soul. And there the quality of service in the world is determined. The work is not ours but His; and, at the same time, not His only but ours also.

They are not of the world . . . I also sent them into the world.

NOTHING is clearer than Christ's ideal for His people in respect of their relationship to the world, and all for which it stands. Entire separation in spirit and aim from all that is "not of the Father" is His determination for the lives of all who bear His name. Of Himself He could say in this same High-Priestly prayer: "I am not of the world." His separation from the world was not that of the ascetic who fears the effects of its contact upon his own purity. Still less was it that of the superior person who scorns its life and despises its doings. He was entirely separated unto the fulfilment of the Father's Will, and in consequence from everything which conflicted with this purpose. Thus Christ's own life is the abiding pattern of heart-separation, alike from the alluring and the opposing world. It is in this same spirit of devotion to the Will of God that His followers are "not of the world."

As with Himself also, such separation only precedes and prepares for contact. It is within this paradox that the true Christian life lies. For those out of whose heart the world has been taken are the very ones through whom God touches the world to save and to heal. They do not rush to take part in its life at their own will but at His appointment. Every necessary correspondence with its interests is purposely designed for the showing forth of His glory. When this devotion to the supreme characterizes our life we are liberated from the tyranny of merely secondary things. Let us seek the sanctification of an absorbing passion for the Will of God.

The cup which My Father hath given Me.

BUT a few hours previously Christ had Himself given a cup to His disciples, in the drinking of which they should for all time commemorate His dying love. In the light of this experience they were the better able to grasp the import of these His words, which interpret all that has hitherto been inexplicable in Him. For His whole life of temptation and toil is as a cup which has been put into His hand by the Father. Hence His willingness to drink it to the dregs. His heroism is entirely explicable in the light of the love which He bore and by which also He was sustained. He knew nothing of second causes, and, in consequence, staggered not at any experience however seemingly untoward. The last bitter draining of the cup is not to Him as defeat in an unequal contest with the world, but as glorious triumph of love and loyalty. Thus, in devotion to the Father, He "tasted death for every man." And His cup of death has, in an inexplicable way, opened for us the fountain of life.

In their wider application to the lives of His disciples, these His words define that attitude of submission and trust which conditions a life of peace and power. Those who seek to live in fellowship with Him are still asked: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink?" —not that of suffering only, but of life measured and mixed by the Will of God. Only as we accept and drink it can we find that accession of power for service and sacrifice which makes possible the blessing of other lives through ours.

What I have written I have written.

PILATE'S retort to the dissatisfied Jews may possibly have been a confession of his own inoperative faith; for in his heart he was convinced of the reality of Christ's claims. If this be so, it is the record of his life's greatest tragedy. In any case, however, it is an unconscious expression on his part of vital truth concerning the life of every man. For life is like the writing of a record in which one indelibly sets down what he is. And each man is to be judged by his own self-written history. One of life's most profound facts is the permanence of character. What a man writes he is unable to revise or to erase. Each writer is faced by the hopeless tyranny of his own record. What he has written he will, in the nature of the case, continue to write. Actions are immortal things and character is undying.

Part of the Gospel to those who have written what is eternally against them is that Christ has robbed the past of its despotism. He has nailed to His Cross all the handwriting of human guilt and shame, and is able in every life so to blot it out as to give the opportunity of writing afresh on a clean page. Then, as with guided hand the new record is written, this law of permanence still remains. What we write under the influence of His Spirit is abiding. Each of us writes a book of character dedicated to his Lord, and, at the same time, adds something also to the record of those other lives which his life consciously or unconsciously influences. How carefully, then, should our words and sentences be formed!

Then came Jesus, the doors being shut.

AS His disciples on the evening of the Resurrection unwittingly shut the Lord out from their company, so are many lives closed to Him. And, as also on that day, so in this, it is the joy of the Saviour to break in upon those who unintentionally have excluded Him from their lives, and who are unspeakably in need of Him. The doors of men's hearts may be closed by engrossment in pleasure or business or friendship, by selfishness of joy or sorrow, by fear of the consequences of identification with Him, or by sin which conscience has already judged. And yet, despite these things, it is really impossible to avoid Christ; for He forces Himself again and again upon our attention. He comes despite closed doors, revealing Himself in any or all of His guises, as Friend, Succourer, Redeemer, King. For He sees and interprets our imperfectly understood longings, and puts the best possible construction upon the activities by which we seek to realize our ideals. By the written Word or the spoken message, by uncontrolled memory or inexplicable impulse, in the glory of the noon-tide or in the quiet watches of the night, He is ever coming to us through our shut doors, offering Himself and all that He is and has for our salvation and life.

His coming thus is with the same intent as always His appearance in the Upper-Room. His first word is always one of benediction, "Peace be unto you"; while He shows His wounded hands and feet which declare that the free gift He bestows has been dearly purchased. In that sanctifying consciousness, He sends His people forth into the world as light-bearers in the darkness and as ambassadors at the court of His enemy: "As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you."

Lord, and what shall this man do?

THE danger of theorizing even in the supreme crises of life is never far from any one of us. We are all prone to receive and pass on the message of Christ to other lives, instead of first applying its force to ourselves. Real interest and concern in the souls of others is truly an evidence of Christ-compassion. But it may be also an idle curiosity, the effect of which is but to deprive and deteriorate our own relationship with Him.

Thus it was with Peter, even in the most solemn and tender experience which his contact with Christ had afforded. Restored to fellowship which sin had forfeited, rekindled to love which floods of anguish had wellnigh drowned, and re-commissioned to the service from which he was self-excluded, he was even yet unable to concentrate upon the Saviour and upon his own soul. His mind was partly upon the fellow-disciple. Unwittingly he attempted to divert the intensely personal statement of Christ's interest over a wider and more general area. And in this he is not alone. For to many an one the river of life has become a mere marsh. Men may turn the Divine message into a mere theory, and so lose its peculiarly personal message of Life.

The first law of the new life is to follow Him, even though we do so solitarily. Nor do we ever fail so to influence our fellows as we courageously set ourselves to tread the pathway of discipleship whose end is so frankly disclosed by our Lord. But they in turn must follow Him and not us. Our concern for them must at all times be utterly disinterested and prompted only by desire for His glory.

This same Jesus . . . shall so come.

AT the beginning of this record of the activities of Christ's earliest followers it is significant that there is given to them the assurance of His Return as an inspiring hope. This promise prefaces all their labour and is henceforth to be the pole-star by which their course of life and service is steered. All the subsequent history of their individual and united witness to the Lord, beginning at Jerusalem and extending to the uttermost parts of the earth, is an account of the labours of men who looked forward with uplifting certainty to the Return of their Lord. Their outlook was not bounded by the possible success of their own efforts, for they were under no illusion as to the likelihood of the conversion of the entire world. Their story is that of men upon whose earthly pathway the heavenly light unceasingly shone, and who marched forward not toward the darkness of death but toward the glorious day of Christ's Appearing.

The certainty of the Coming of the Lord is likewise the inspiration of His servants in this our day. Commissioned by His Word, and endued by His Spirit, they are upheld by the hope of His Advent. For them there can be no ultimate triumph short of this. While their witness enlightens the whole world, its effect is to call out from the world those who, accepting its message, become His Body and His Bride. The objective of their expectation is not in world-wide schemes of social reform, nor in the comprehensive development of human character, but in the Appearing of the Lord from heaven. This is the hope which alone imparts conquering passion.

This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.

UNDER the Pentecostal illumination the early disciples had no difficulty in identifying their present experience with Old Testament prophecy. As with lightning-flash He Who was its Inspirer and Author lit up its true meaning, and gave to the wondering hearts of the men who had recently experienced the baptism of Power from on High a steadying assurance that all that had come to them was surely from God, according to His promise and prediction. For faith must always have its sure foundation not in any subjective experience, however hallowed, but in the Divine certainty of the written Word. Hence, at the outset of this history of some of the acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church, the Scriptures of Truth are affirmed and attested as the Divine chart and charter.

This fulfilment of prophecy through the experience of human lives is an indication of the method by which the truth of God comes to its own in the world. For as His Word is made incarnate in the lives of His people it becomes credible to those who, in every age, ask for a sign. The fact that His power is manifested in the transformation of human character, according to promise, incontestably proclaims the Divine authority of the Word. Every redeemed soul is to be God's proof to an unbelieving world. If we do not arouse its amazement so that it exclaims, " What is this ? " we are obviously lacking in vital experience. And if we are not then able to respond " This is that which was spoken," we are deficient in the knowledge of our Lord.

Acts iii. 16.

Through faith in His Name hath made this man strong.

HOW soon had the Spirit-filled disciples of the Lord learned the power of His Name! Promises which He had Himself given them in earlier days flashed into life and glowed with the fire of new meaning as His Spirit possessed and controlled them. Confronted and challenged by difficulty in the person and importunity of the lame beggar, they were emboldened to call His Name in such wise as that He answered to it in miraculous fashion. Thus openly put to the test, He manifested, as He ever does, His nature of power and pity. In such circumstances, the men who behold have no longer ground for unbelief and doubt.

Christ is eternally the same, and His is ever the Name "high over all, in earth, and sky, and sea." It is "the only Name given among men whereby we must be saved;" and in this our day we need more than anything to recover the same dominant faith in its power as these early disciples had. For the world will be convinced only as it is clear that we are ourselves convinced. When faith in His Name makes our lives strong, and through us also the lives of others—so that no longer do we or they sit hopelessly around the temple-gate, but are unmistakably quickened into newness of life—those who observe the miracle are forced either to believe in Him or to deny their own observation. With such an issue as this ever before us, how diligent should we be in applying all the available resources of strength which are stored in His Name to the moral weakness of our own nature. Debilitated and enfeebled though we be, as the outcome of past sin, He can strengthen us thus to serve the interests of His glory.

They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

IT is not a little surprising that the quality which identified Peter and John with Jesus, in the minds of the people, and marked them out as being of His company, was their boldness under test. It incidentally casts an illuminating sidelight upon the character of Christ Himself. We are accustomed to think of Him in the Gospel records as generous, gracious, sympathetic, and tender—but not always as a Man of boldness. And yet it was just this characteristic which impressed the men of His day, and which, when reproduced in His followers was immediately recognized. Nor is their discrimination at fault. For how great was His boldness in rebuking sin, in consorting with sinners, in declaring the love of God, in committing Himself to the world's redemption, and in entrusting its evangelization to His followers.

Only in the school of Christ can this virtue be acquired. Men who sit at His feet are not slow to arise at His bidding, even though their commission is to face the whole world's hostility toward Him and them. There is a courage which is born of reckless ignorance; but such is not that of His servants. There is courage, too, of a better sort, which is the outcome of assured knowledge, and in the certainty of its resources is free from all boasting while ready for all duty. And this is the boldness which comes of companying with Him. It is seldom mistaken and never overlooked. If a man has been with Jesus in secret fellowship others cannot fail to note it. And it is by such indubitable witness that the increase of His Kingdom is accomplished.

That . . . the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

THIS incident of superstitious reverence for the persons of those whom God was using in His service is an illustration of the undisputed truth of life's unconscious influence. Just as the shadow of Peter fell, all unconsciously to himself, upon those who were laid in his pathway, so we are always influencing either for blessing or for blight those with whom we daily come into contact. This fact is so patent as to need no insistence, for it is one of the outstanding realities of our lives.

A man's shadow is the result of his position with regard to the sun. Similarly the influence of a man's character is conditioned by his relationship to the Sun of Righteousness. What he is toward Jesus Christ determines also what he is toward man. As his shadow is the projection of the likeness of his form upon some other object, so his influence is the expression of his real self, and is hence conditioned by the actual quality of his hidden life. It is on this account that every man is responsible for the kind of unconscious influence he exerts. And this is a high responsibility which cannot be measured by words. For we are always touching the springs of moral action in others, and so play a part in the determination of their destiny.

How, then, do we stand toward Christ, toward His recognized Will and His warranted expectations? What is our attitude toward the light which He sheds upon us? The answer to these questions determines of what sort is our influence and what kind of shadow we are casting.

We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.

SERVICE for Christ involves nothing less than this. Its demands, alike with its issues, require that a man should give himself entirely to its activities. For if it is to be fruitful it can never be a mere overplus tacked on to the ordinary activities of life. Its inner and outer spheres are here well defined. The secret life of prayer alone prepares and qualifies for the public life of ministry. And each of these is equally necessary in order to accomplish the glory of God. For while work without prayer is sheer presumption, prayer without work is mere fanaticism.

Power for service is not so much an acquisition as an accumulation. A man becomes strong for the ministry of the Word only as he devotes his entire life toward its fulfilment. To understand rightly the necessity of this preparation puts new emphasis on the giving of ourselves to prayer. For it is in prayer that motives are tested, ideals examined, plans adjudged, and relative worth revealed. As the mariner adjusts his compass before a voyage, so the servant of Christ prepares himself for the ministry of the Word.

Ministry, which is the expression and outcome of life thus lived before God, may be of infinite variety, but is always a mediation of His Word to others. For this the world hungers, and without this it perishes. It cannot but involve conflict and opposition from the great adversary, and can in consequence be sustained only as its inspiration is fed at the hidden springs of communion with God. But we fail entirely if we fail to " give ourselves."

Acts vii. 9.

But God was with him.

THUS is the story of Joseph's vicissitudes interpreted for his descendants. Stephen, arraigned before the Council, makes his apologia by an appeal to the Divine government and control of men and causes since the early beginnings of the nation. Confidently he traces the hand of God in all that has made up the history of His chosen people. Behind the great movements in which prophet and king bore part is the unresting yet unhasting activity of the Lord. Human mistakes have been overruled by Divine wisdom, and human sins dealt with by Divine love. And it is this certainty of His unceasing concern in the affairs of men which has had its crown in the coming of Christ. The interpretation of Joseph's life as being God-companied, is prophetic of the eternal Emmanuel—God with us.

To rest upon the fact of His presence, even when, as with Joseph, it is disguised and hidden behind seeming unkindly providences, is to have light in the darkest hour. It is often difficult to see anything of moral and spiritual value in pit and prison, in false accusation and difficulty. To look, however, beyond these secondary things to Him Who is never a passive partner in His people's lives, insures that calm and steady continuance in the ways of His Will which is the identification of His children. Since Christ has pledged Himself to this very thing, we may recognize and rest upon His faithfulness, even though sense is dulled and circumstances seem to contradict this assurance.

He arose and went.

THERE is no finer instance on record of an entirely surrendered soul than that of Philip. Instrumental under God in bringing about a great Revival in a populous city, he is at once willing, when Divinely bidden, to leave the scene of his successful labours and to go out on what seemed an unpromising errand of obedience, under sealed orders. Without hesitation, when he knew the voice which spoke to be that of the Spirit of God, he at once relinquished the glad fellowship of Samaria for the loneliness of the desert. The true servant knows that his Master has need of him in only one place at a time. He knows also that in no other place, however inviting its aspect, can he effectively serve Him. To realize that every detail of life is comprehended in His great plan creates a disposition to obey Him, even when the wherefore of the commission is inexplicable.

Philip's meeting with the inquiring soul, so obviously of Divine pre-arrangement, and with an issue far larger than could have been conceived, declares plainly that Christ is sometimes better served on the part of His servant in the doing of small than of great things. The strategic value of a single soul won to Him is greater than any can compute. The man who is in touch with Him will be on the look-out at all times to grasp every opportunity for such service. And even amid circumstances as frankly impossible as the desert these are to be found. Fellowship with Christ imparts a power of ready discernment and courteous approach to men, and gives to His servants a quick understanding and a power of effective helpfulness which will win the unlikeliest.

Acts ix. 5–6.

Who art Thou, Lord? Lord, what wilt Thou?

WELL it is for any man, when the illumination of the Spirit breaks upon him, that he is found to be utterly sincere and ready to follow the light. It was so with Saul of Tarsus. Mistaken though he had hitherto been with regard to Christ, even to the point of violent hostility to His claims and to His people, he nevertheless was entirely honest; and, on being savingly convinced of his error, was as earnest in his desire for the right as he had been in his prosecution of the wrong. His double question to the Lord is both an interpretation and a prophecy of his whole subsequent life. In the light that never shone on land or sea he recognized the Son of God, Who henceforth became his unrivalled Lord. Believing in Him, from that very hour he belonged to Him. All his future life of toil and testimony is his whole-hearted response to Christ's desire.

Spiritual integrity is only preserved as spiritual independence is maintained. The one who takes as the sole guidance of life the Will of the Lord is by his choice delivered from every other bondage. When Christ is supreme every other influence becomes merely secondary. "What wilt Thou, Lord?" cuts convincingly through the thickest tangle alike of circumstance and counter-attraction. Nor does the Lord ever leave any man, who is thus desirous of obeying, in doubt as to His requirements. The path may be narrow; but it is never obscure to the one who asks the way to Zion with his face thitherward.

Thy prayers . . . are come up for a memorial.

IT is strikingly significant that God should hold in remembrance a man's prayers, and should regard them as the attestation of his true character and the expression of his real self. Alas, how often are our prayers the most thoughtless and unconsidered of all our words. How often, too, do the actions of our lives contradict their sentiments. If we always remembered that our prayers are immortal in their good or evil quality, how differently should we order our prayer-life; and how much more real would be our approach to God at all times.

Cornelius, despite his imperfect enlightenment, had nevertheless prayed sincerely. He had obviously endeavoured to make his life correspond to his petitions to the God he so dimly apprehended. His was a soul prepared, alike by its own resolute integrity and its sense of need, ro receive aright the full light of the Gospel. God never fails such an one. If any man willeth to do His Will he shall surely be led into knowledge of the Doctrine.

Let it ever be borne in mind also, that with us, as with him, it is not only prayers but "alms" also which "come up for a memorial before God." Our works testify to the value of words. Our sympathies reveal the worth of our sentiments. Prayer and practice at all times unite in writing the enduring record of our lives. What they write either commends or condemns us, declaring our fitness for the fellowship and the service of the Kingdom or our lack of capacity for its revelation and responsibility. Take heed, then, how ye pray—and live.

Acts xi. 24.

He was a good man.

BARNABAS is a type of the ordinary man who, apart from outstanding genius or conspicuous ability, yet finds life a grand opportunity for the glory and service of the Lord. Having dedicated himself to His service by open avowal and the consecration of his possessions, he manifested throughout his whole career the fitness of his name—" a son of consolation." For his love to the Lord was expressed in his every relationship with others. He saw in them the grace of God, having no eye for the imperfections of character by which their work was doubtless marred. Hence, he became sponsor for Paul himself when others looked upon him with suspicion. Only a " good man " is able to manifest such generous faith in the confession of a convert whose past has been so unlikely. Hence, also, it was that he gladly undertook the small and almost secular duties which were assigned to him, and so approved himself in the discharge of them that he is subsequently chosen by the Holy Ghost Himself for the high honour of the missionary commission.

God's eye is ever upon the man whose eye is upon Him. In the service of the Kingdom every man is put to work for which his character qualifies him. A good minister must first of all be a " good man." Such goodness as marked out Barnabas, which is likewise the responsibility of each of us, can only become ours as it became his. " He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." To be Spirit-filled means to be self-emptied ; and to be full of faith means to be void of self-confidence. Thus is a " good man " made.

Forthwith the angel departed from him.

THE real test for Peter, after he had been so surprisingly liberated from the prison-house, came when the angel-messenger left him at the front gate. In glad amaze he had gone forward into freedom under the spell of his presence. Now that he has left him, his faith is put to its trial. Similarly for us all. The ultimate test of our Christian life is not the character and quality of our actions in moments of high spiritual elation, but in the succeeding hours when these have passed. Inevitably all our emotional experiences are but transitory and preparatory. God does not reveal Himself to any man in a continuous ministry of miracle. He does not do for any what they can do for themselves ; otherwise His grace would be inimical to our truest development. It would rob us of the opportunity of acquiring moral strength and fibre.

This is why our angel-messengers are but visitors. When they have gone we must translate into obedience the message they have brought us. We light our torches at the heavenly flame they bear ; but we must carry the light with our own hands to illumine the darkness which is all about our "daily round and common task." When the angel has departed, whether he comes clad in the sombre garments of sorrow or in the white raiment of joy, we have got to live our lives for God before men. The commonplace affords us every opportunity we shall need for effective and fruitful Christian witness. To lose any part of its glory is to misconceive the purport of our angel-messenger, and to fail of the grace to which he has introduced us.

Unworthy of everlasting life.

SUCH language and such action on the part of Paul toward the people of Athens almost seems a contradiction of the Gospel. For did not Christ come to make unworthy ones meet for His Kingdom? Since "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," is it not strange that these should have been singled out as peculiarly unworthy of the grace and gift of God? And is not the fact that they are so described, to their condemnation, and that the bound of their opportunity was so fixed by their own attitude, a solemn warning?

Unworthiness of everlasting life is achieved in any man by unwillingness to relinquish recognized sin. The issue is always plain to those to whom the Gospel comes. It is that they either put from them their sin or the salvation of God. The solemn fact, however, is that men often cling to sin until they simply cannot put it away. For moral attitudes tend to crystallize into practically unalterable states, and character thus formed determines destiny. Although the world is not always gross in form it is malignant in influence. The effect of its power is the deterioration of mind and heart to the point of incapacity for any other and more serious purpose than the pursuit of its pleasures and possessions. Chiefest of all, however, unworthiness is manifested in emphatic rejection of the Son of God. "Ye put it from you" was Paul's charge against these men; and it covered everything of their moral indictment. By insincere excuses and perpetual procrastination many still write themselves down as "unworthy of everlasting life"! The sentence is written by each man himself.

He left not Himself without witness.

THUS is declared the progressive revelation by which God has from the beginning of time enlightened the minds of men with regard to Himself. The world of Nature witnesses alike to His power and His law. The steadfast mountains, the shining stars, the flowing rivers, and the recurring seasons, all unite in declaring His being, His wisdom, and His goodness. These things in every age have impressed men with awe, as they have thus made them conscious of His existence. From earth's earliest days men have not been able to escape the conclusion that the God of Nature is the One with Whom also they personally have to do. Beyond the witness of Nature, He has revealed Himself also in the witness of individuals and of a nation; and beyond that also, the crown of all His witness is in the life and death of His own Son. He Who incarnates all the wisdom and power of God is His unchanging testimony to the sons of men.

Such a word as this is true also in its narrower application to the Divine ordering of human affairs; and herein is its personal significance to us. In every community He has set some of His children to bear His light and to declare His life. This is the explanation of the providential arrangement of circumstance and environment which sometimes causes perplexity to the lonely and solitary Christian. Cut off from helpful fellowship of others, outnumbered many times by those whose disposition is hostile or indifferent, the unrevealed reason for such necessity causes them to wonder, and often also to long for escape. To all such, here is the solution: God has not left Himself without witness. Our part is to keep the lamp trimmed. His part is to determine how long it shall shine—and where.

Men that have hazarded their lives for the Name.

HIGHER commendation than this is not to be found in the entire record of the Christian Church. It speaks of a reckless courage which is only explicable by the controlling impulse of a great affection. Love of country, devotion to a cause, or desire for glory, have at times variously inspired men to spontaneous and sudden bravery in which consequences have not been considered nor life itself regarded. But such heroism as is here recorded is of a different order. These lived as men who had staked their existence on the cause of Christ; and that because their hearts had been captured by His love. The deepest thing in them was their passion for "The Name" which had brought to them salvation, and which meant to them everything that made life itself worth the living. They sought out no easy pathway, but coveted the high places of the field, if there they might but strengthen His hand even at the sacrifice of life itself.

What an inspiration, and what a condemnation also, are such lives to us who shrink so frequently and so weakly when, in the same Name, we are commissioned to some service of difficulty and possible danger. How such a record humbles us with the consciousness that we hazard little for Christ just because our devotion to Him is deficient. Where calculation of cost begins, real consecration ends. Where limits of service are defined, love is feeble. The measure of our abandonment for Christ is the measure of our appreciation of Him. Surely His battles call for the heroic to-day no less than in those days.

At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.

THE circumstances in which Paul and Silas found themselves had no power to conquer their faith. Bound in the darkness of the prison, and bleeding as the result of cruel scourgings, they might well have been excused from praise—yet they broke out into song. They were not passive victims of, but positive victors over, their seeming hard fate; and though by no means insensible of pain, they were enabled to "rejoice in the Lord always." Any man can sing when he is at liberty; but it takes grace, and courage, and love to sing when one is in prison—and that unjustly. What a testimony to the prisoners and the jailer was the song of Paul and Silas! Zion's songs are never so melodious as when they come from the people of God in adversity.

In all circumstances the subject of the Lord's song is its justification and the explanation of its fitness. For, what is the subject but the glorious reality of His unchanging grace, His abounding faithfulness, and His unending love? In the very singing of it the castdown believer often finds light springing up in his own darkness; while at the same time nothing proves so arresting to those who are around us, and who, expecting us to repine under the adversity, find us rejoicing. Let every suffering and downcast believer be assured that it will repay him for keeping back the tears and summoning the hesitant lips to praise, if the result of his song is the cry of some convicted soul: "What must I do to be saved?"

Acts xvii. 16.

While Paul waited . . . his spirit was stirred in him.

ONE of the surest tests of any man's life is the character of the influence which most readily moves him to action. That which exercises impelling strength and driving force over him is the thing which declares the quality of his soul. Such an one as Paul cannot look out upon the idolatry of Athens, with all its licentious accompaniment, without being stirred. It made an appeal to him which overbore any consideration of prudence in respect of personal consequence, so that single-handed he lifted the gage flung down by the Adversary and joined battle for Christ. There is hardly a more noble spectacle in the whole range of human achievement than that which is presented by one weak man confronting the hostile learning and the ignorant power and prejudice of that great heathen city. Back of it, as its explaining cause, was his living fellowship with Christ.

Such a record compels us to self-examination; for we have the same Christ as Paul had, and are confronted with something of the same conditions. Indeed, our possible knowledge of Christ and His work is even greater than was his. For we are enriched by the history of His doings and of the unfolding of His ways which was unavailable in his day. Yet how different is our common outlook upon the world! How complacently we behold its idolatry! How easily we are seduced by its glittering fascinations! How readily do we become ensnared in its entanglements! And all the while the city awaits the saving witness of Christ which we could give—if we would.

I will return . . . if God will.

IT is entirely necessary that the servant of Christ lays his plans for the future of his work. There is never any merit in a mere haphazard waiting for things to arrange themselves. Common foresight is in no wise a contradiction of faith; and indeed, God not infrequently leaves the responsibility of actual selection, within the limits of His declared intimations, to His servants. Thus it is that Paul declares his intention of returning to Ephesus for further ministry there. He has already learned, however, that there is a higher Will which controls his own without crushing it. What that Will is, is never disclosed all at once. Willingness to have his own plan revised, and to have his every intention confirmed or contradicted by the Will of God, brings unassailable peace to each surrendered child of His.

It is always safe, when compelled to wait for the full revelation of God's Will in regard to any matter, to go on meanwhile in the plainly outlined path of duty. To do the next thing of obvious responsibility is to make certain the ampler knowledge of His purpose which the soul needs for its ultimate guidance. It is to the man who is actually following Him that Christ promises the light of life. Let us therefore be careful both to do all that we know and to make this also the proviso of all our planning. "I will, if the Lord will," is the condition alike for confidence and courage. For it announces a life-programme which is but pencilled in our own writing, and submitted to Him either for erasure or approval. Then the glad acceptance of His plan always ensures the certain co-operation of His power.

Acts xix. 2 (R.V.).

Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?

THE Ephesian Christians whom Paul thus questions were the fruit of the labour of Apollos. He who himself knew only "the baptism of John," could lead them into no fuller experience of God than his own. In spiritual as in natural things also, we reproduce only our own type. It is probable in this instance that Paul's quick discernment marked an obvious lack of those distinguishing characteristics which are the evidences of Spirit-filled lives; and in his keen desire that Christ should be entirely glorified he thus presses upon them the necessity of being filled with the Holy Ghost. For only the Spirit can reproduce in the believer the character of the Lord Jesus. His grace, His gentleness, His humility, His forebearance, His long-suffering, His zeal, His prayerfulness, His fidelity—in short His very likeness—can only appear in the lives of His people as they are utterly dominated by His Spirit. Human endeavour and resolve are not sufficient for this. That which is merely the outcome of the desires and efforts of the flesh is only flesh; but that which is the outcome of the indwelling Spirit is the very life of Christ in and through His followers.

The receiving the Holy Ghost is a separable experience from that of conversion, though not necessarily a separate one. There is no reason why a newly-born soul, from the moment of his acceptance of Christ, should not likewise claim and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yet this is far from being always the case. Potentially all is ours when Christ is accepted as Saviour. Actually, however, all is only ours as faith appropriates the birthright gifts.

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

NOTHING is more necessary to service which is at once approved of God and of acceptance before man, than humility. The servant of Christ who lacks this grace is a contradiction of the Gospel which he mediates. No amount of zeal, or forcefulness, or ability, can make up for its absence. The one who proclaims the Truth must himself incarnate its character and power. How essentially does this becoming humility distinguish the life and service of Paul. Bold to rebuke evil, as he must needs be; outstanding among all men in the fulfilment of his commission; immovable in his certainty as to the truth of his message—there was yet in his life and bearing an all-pervasive spirit of humility which disarmed opposition and countered prejudice, and so made opening for his work. In this same spirit we must follow him as he followed Christ.

Humility of mind cannot be simulated. Nothing indeed is more noxious than the spurious counterfeit of this grace which some men have attempted. Nor does it ever pass muster with the world; for it is fatally easy of detection. True humility is compact of knowledge, and penitence, and reverence. The man who knows the holiness of God and his own sinfulness, whose heart is bowed beneath its own shame and uplifted by the might of His grace, and whose spirit is contrite in the presence of the redeeming Love which has rescued and saved him, cannot be other than humble, yet confident, before men. Little in his own eyes, the Lord ever makes such an one great by honouring and confirming his witness.

Acts xxi. 13.

I am ready.

THIS is no foolish boasting or empty bravado on the part of the apostle. He does not question the truth nor the seriousness of the warning which has been given him as to the outcome of his intended journey. He is convinced, however, that there is something of infinitely greater importance to him than any consideration as to his own safety. The Will of the Lord is the ruling factor in his life; and to one who has enthroned Christ as his Lord there is no alternative to the carrying out of His bidding. Nor is any desired. He is ready as a messenger to run on His errands, as a soldier to engage in His conflicts, or as a servant to toil at His tasks. It is enough for him that he is in His service at all; and Christ cannot but use such a man.

The history of most of our failures in Christian service is commonly the history of unreadiness. For calls are apt to come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly; and only the one whose loins are girded about and whose feet are shod in readiness of obedience can respond to them. Opportunities are of all things the most fleeting. In presenting themselves they leave no time to prepare for the seizing of them.

"I am ready," is the voice of a man who has long ago counted the cost and settled for ever the issue. Behind such a declaration lies the miracle of transforming fellowship with Christ. For only so does the hindering sense of personal unfitness pass, and absorption in all unworthier causes cease. Only so, too, is sympathy inspired and capacity created. It is in "the secret place" that Paul, and we also, must learn the secret of the ready heart and hand, which is the whole secret of life.

Chosen . . . that thou shouldest know His will.

THUS is God's purpose comprehensively expressed to the awakened soul. The knowledge of His Will embraces all the lore that any man needs for life and godliness. He who discovers, as all may, what is God's personal intent for him, is in possession of the open secret of the life saved and sanctified.

For Paul, the Will of God embraced three things at least, which are likewise vital to every believer. He was to "see that Just One." That is, he was to have personal intimate communion with Jesus Christ, the Saviour and the Standard of life. This is any man's prime qualification for the service of the Kingdom. Christ must be seen before He can be shown of us. Then he was to "hear the voice of His mouth." That is, he was to receive direct from Him the instruction as to His requirement and promise upon which all the activity of life was subsequently to be based. As the outcome of these experiences, he was to be His "witness unto all men" of what he had seen and heard.

The Will of God for every one of us connotes the same three things, with all the possibility that they express. Vision, fellowship, and service together make up that life which is abiding. This is the threefold secret of all that is of enduring value and influence. For when all things fade away, he that knoweth and "doeth the Will of God abideth for ever." How solemn is the certainty that, even though we have some knowledge of these things, we may yet fail of God's choice by unreadiness of response and unwillingness of surrender! And how urgent is the necessity for honest sincerity in the making of His choice ours.

Be of good cheer.

THE Lord is never far from His discouraged servant. When all things seem contrary, and his best efforts only draw upon him the hostility of the foes of his Master, He is ever at hand to encourage and hearten him. Such sympathetic love cannot remain silent nor distant in such a circumstance. How full of comfort is His implied assurance, that the service which has aroused the opposition was at least acceptable to Him. And how heartening is the prospect of yet further and fuller service which opens up in the hour when all seems lost! Faithful testimony in Jerusalem is rewarded by the opportunity of yet more difficult and dangerous witness in Rome. This is the order of true promotion in the Kingdom. Christ ever rewards those who follow Him by renewing to them the sacred privilege of engagement in His interests,—and the opportunity of yet further conflict.

How entirely does He know the causes of discouragement. And how fully does He appreciate every bit of suffering gladly borne for His sake. The pathway of obedient and courageous testimony is always the way to deeper fellowship with Himself. We are never nearer His heart than when surrounded by the hostile forces actively arrayed against His truth, for which we stand as witnesses. Nor is there other inspiration needed than that of His own voice and strengthening touch. The renewal of His confidence gives fresh and sufficient impulse to go through with His service, cost what it may.

Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

THIS is not a profession of perfect attainment but rather the confession of a perfect aim. To have an unoffended conscience is the noblest and purest ideal of Christian manhood; and since conscience is the compass needle of the soul, that man alone is steering a worthy course who at all times unflinchingly submits himself to its judgment.

Conscience is not a mere intuition by which we determine right from wrong. Still less is it an independent source of law. As a clock has to be synchronized with the standard time if it is to be of any use, so conscience must be regulated by the Word of God that its voice may always be the echo of the Divine voice. Only so is it a safe guide in its apprehensions and judgments. Hence it is that the apostle speaks elsewhere of the commendation of a "pure conscience;" and again of the condemnation of an "evil conscience." Any disregard of its determination and requirement is unequivocally declared to be sin.

In his bold testimony before Felix, Paul indicates the all-inclusive sphere over which conscience presides. It governs all contact and relationship with the seen and the unseen, with the eternal and the temporal, and is directed both toward God and man. It embraces alike the heart's intention and the life's action; and never is any Christian exempt from strenuous personal endeavour to live according to its dictates. Only so can holiness, which is the Christian calling, be attained, either by Paul or by us. We shall scale its heights, and live in the transfiguring light of unclouded communion with God, only as we master and practise this same exercise. But let us not forget that it demands the whole toil of the soul.

I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat.

HERE is the noble example of a man who is not afraid to court the most searching investigation into his character and actions. He has long lived before the Lord, submitting himself to the scrutiny of His gaze and regulating his life by the sanctions of His approval. Hence it is that he fears the verdict of no human tribunal. The fierce light that men may throw upon him is as darkness compared to the light in which his inner life is always passed. To stand before Cæsar brings no tremor to the man who has learned to stand before Heaven. He whose soul is constantly bowed before God can well be bold before all men. He fears man little just because he fears God much.

Behind Paul's boldness is an established confidence that he is immortal until his work is accomplished. All the interests and issues of his life move within the prescribed circle of God's Will; and hence Cæsar himself can have no power to touch him, save as the Lord permits. Such assurance comes only to the man whose heart is pure. For only he can see God on this wise. There is moral strength in a clear conscience which can never be measured, but which enables the servant of Christ to face the untoward consequences of his faithfulness to the Lord without flinching. Such an one sees only in the necessity of standing before Cæsar an opportunity of further testifying to the Saviour Whose he is. The things that there happen to him can only fall out to the furtherance of the Gospel. And herein he is content; for this is the deliberate intention and ideal of his entire life.

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

THUS Paul records the governing secret of his splendid life. The fountain of his amazing energies, so recklessly expended in the cause of Christ,—and with such immeasurable result, is to be sought in his vision of the Crucified. In the mountains of fellowship all the streams of faithfulness take their rise. Once convinced as to His claims upon him, and once assured as to His demands upon the life which He has redeemed, Paul never swerved. Obedience which began thus deliberately became instinctive to him as life progressed. It involved sacrifice and loss, and led him into paths from which mere human nature would have shrunk. But none of these things moved him from the considered purpose of his life, which had grown into an absorbing passion. Behind his unquestioned obedience to every expanding apprehension of Christ's Will was the all-powerful dynamic of personal devotion to Him Who had loved and given Himself for him.

This, too, is the only worthy attitude of every one who, like Paul, has seen the Lord from Heaven. Alas, how few there are who have always unflinchingly obeyed Him from the first day until now! Let this truth grip us—that it is not in the volume of our song, nor in the orthodoxy of our creed, nor yet in the activity of our zeal, that the true Christian faith is attested. It is in the simplicity and directness of our obedience. This is love, that we keep His commandments. And this is the everlasting distinction of His disciples, that they "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," and walk with Him in white raiment.

I believe God.

EVEN in the awful hour of peril, when everything spoke of danger and imminent death, the man who knows God is able thus to express his triumphant conviction. No storm, however fierce, can shake the faith which is built upon experience. No gale can shift from his moorings the one whose life is anchored to the sure Word of God. He may not be able to explain the why and wherefore of his circumstance, nor to come at the reason of his present embarrassment. But this he knows, that God is faithful; and for his part, although every evidence of sense seems to contradict his assurance, he still believes God Such a man is the despair of the adversary. With faith unshaken and unsullied, he is invincible.

When tempted by storm and stress to doubt and deny the things which in brighter days we have seen and reckoned upon, let the memory of God's unfailing mercy shape our confession of faith. When sin overwhelms us, and the consciousness of weakness robs us of all courage, then bear in mind the promises to which He has pledged Himself; and dare to believe in Him for their fulfilment. When the imperious demand of duty finds us morally ill-prepared, do not fear to venture upon the Strength that declares itself "perfect in weakness." And when all around in the world is disorder and chaos and tumult, do not forget that "the Lord reigneth" and "sitteth above the water-floods." In all such times as these, "I believe God" is a bridge over the darkest waters into the land of promise.

Two whole years in his own hired house.

WITH this picture of a hired house in Rome, and an imprisoned apostle daily converting it into an antechamber of the Kingdom of Heaven, the inspired record of the holy activities of the early Church concludes. And it is surely a strong inspiration to all who profess the faith of Christ. Few, if any of us, can ever scale the heights of public and prominent service for the Lord on which much of Paul's life was lived. We cannot stand with him disputing with rulers and mightily convincing whole cities of the reality and the power of our Lord. Nor can we all traverse sea and land as ambassadors of the King. But we can, each one of us, dwell in his own house amid the commonplace duties of life and make of every one of them an opportunity for "teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus."

It is when the stream which has its source far off in the high hills of God flows down into the flat and desert country of our ordinary common lives, there to sweeten and sanctify and save, that we alone realize the purpose of our redemption. For the highest enduement of Heaven is intended to qualify us for the lowest service of earth. It may be, and often is, unseen and entirely unapplauded by men. Like much of the earthly ministry of the Saviour Himself it may be quite inconspicuous and almost negligible because of its lack of the showy qualities which appeal so loudly to the world. But in the sight of the Lord it is priceless. And in the end of the day it will be seen that it is of this sort of service that the Kingdom is builded.

Not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

WRITTEN in anticipation of his intended visit and future service at Rome, this letter sets forth in germ all that Paul purposed then to declare. Fully aware of the conditions to be met there, he affirms at the outset that he is neither an apologist nor an advocate, but a simple witness who speaks from out the depths of his being what he knows by personal experience of Christ. His evangel is its own best defence; for it is the very power of God. Philosophy might demand the defence of successful argument. Power needs only application to the common conditions and needs of human life in Rome to justify all that is claimed for it.

The content of the Gospel is in one word, "Christ." His perfect life, His atoning death, His victorious resurrection, and His certain coming again, all foretold by prophetic inspiration and fulfilled by sovereign faithfulness, constitute a dynamic strong enough to save and transform into His likeness every believing sinner. The scope and sweep of its power is limitless, embracing the need of the world. It is available on the simplest terms; for its strength is experienced as its promises are appropriated by faith. The heart which receives what the mind perceives, on the warrant of the Divine Word, is lifted into a new and victorious life, whereof the only and entire explanation is the power of God.

Such a Gospel, which at once saves the sinner and shows forth the Lord, forbids all false shame in the man who is entrusted with its proclamation. The rather does he glory in the fact that he is entrusted as an ambassador with its message of power.

God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

TWO strong notes of time combine in the harmony of the Gospel—"to-day"—the day of grace—and "that day"—the day of judgment. For all men life is a continuity; and the immortality of conduct is one of its most impressive facts. We travel onward toward the ultimate judgment of life, when it is certain that all will be well with us only if all is right now. It is no part of the Divine purpose to make men solemn or to rob life of its zest. But it is the constant aim of His Word thus to impart seriousness and to invest life with worthy purpose.

One of the most striking forecasts of "that day" is this foretold judgment of secrets, that is, of the things which now most influence conduct for good or evil. It is possible to go through life hiding them more or less successfully from others, and even in time to hide them from conscience. There is no greater folly, however, than of imagining that because they are hidden they are done with; while, as a matter of fact, they are either making or marring character and hence determining destiny, according as they are secret faiths or secret faults. The judgment of "that day" will reveal nothing more than the hidden man of the heart as he exists to-day.

Christ is not only the Judge but the standard also of the judgment. What we have known of Him, and how we have used that knowledge, will entirely determine both commendation and condemnation. "That day" will simply disclose the secret longings or hostilities of our hearts, and set us forth as His friends or His foes.

Through faith in His blood.

HERE, in the simplest statement, is brought together the great Cause and the single condition of salvation. The Blood of Jesus Christ—symbolic of the life laid down as a propitiation and an atonement for sin—is the ground-work and foundation of all faith, and of all the present and eternal blessedness of which faith is the human condition.

The Blood of Christ satisfies the requirements of Divine justice and of the human conscience also. It declares the love of God in terms beyond all speech; for it reveals God Himself in contact with sin and suffering. What Righteousness demands Love provides; and hence the Blood of Christ is the great proclamation of the grace of God, which is chiefly seen not in the life which He lived among men but in the death which He voluntarily died for them. Its implication is that God, Who was not indifferent to the fact of a world's sin, is not and cannot be indifferent to the need of any individual soul.

How simple is the condition upon which the benefits of Christ's death are brought into a human life. Faith believes what God says, accepts what He offers, and sets itself to do what He enjoins. It is not mere mental assent to a truth, but self-surrendering union with a Person. Its strength is not in its subjective experience, but in the great objective fact on which it lays hold. It is the open hand of the child stretched out to receive the gift. Its capacity grows by exercise, until, from being a series of acts of will it becomes a maintained attitude of soul. The saved man lives by the faith of the Son of God Who loved and gave Himself for him.

Fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

THIS is a glimpse of the hidden life of the "friend of God." Abraham's record of faith is one of the abiding examples whereby men have in every age been encouraged to believe in God's providence and power. Lifted into His fellowship under the spell of an all-conquering persuasion, he reckoned upon God as the great Factor in every situation of his life. Difficulties were measured against His might, and so lost their terrifying bigness. Sorrow was seen as part of His perfect love, and so was robbed of its power to create doubt. Life itself was to him God's handiwork, and so lost its angry look and became a benediction. In this calm confidence, based upon God's specific promises, Abraham calmly went forward into what seemed the darkness, only to prove that God Himself had cleft through it a pathway of shining light.

Such full persuasion, which is the secret of all strong and effective Christian living, develops by experience. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As the mountaineer uses each foothold gained as a new starting-point, so is the grand ascent of faith. What God has already proved Himself to the soul which feebly trusts Him, becomes the ground of new confidence as the man goes on with Him. It would be as unnatural to him to doubt God's power as to doubt his own existence. And as with Abraham, so with us. Faith's beginning may be in the nature of an experiment. We venture out upon some promise of God whose meaning and bearing we but dimly understand. With nothing behind of precedent, and nothing before of enlightenment, the steps of such a faith fall on a seeming void. But only to find a rock beneath.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

WHETHER as history or present fact this word opens a door leading out upon a new life to each one who accepts and trusts its declaration. It is the climax of the apostle's contrast between that of which sin has deprived men and that in which God has effected their deliverance. Whatever has been lost under the reign of the old Adam has been more than restored by Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. While sin has abused its victims, grace to save, to cleanse, and to uplift them into His own life, has abounded toward them in Christ. Grace defies definition, but may be best described as being the activity of the love of God in contact with the sin-created need of man. This triumphant Evangel is the exultation of one who has experienced its power. It strikes the highest note of all, in the glad anthem of a liberated soul.

As history, the fulfilment of this statement is most clearly to be found at "the place called Calvary." There where human sin and guilt was seen in its abounding hostility toward God, His grace was manifested in brightness which paled the sun. There the abundance of His love for ever conquered the foe, and set free the captives of evil. The Cross, while it stands as the eternal memorial of abounding transgression, for ever stands also as the eternal manifestation of a much more abounding grace.

As the testimony of experience the power of this word is to be sought in every saved life ; for into the deepest and darkest realms of men's being the healing virtues of God's grace have come. The wreckers' fires of lust, of passion, of pride, and of self-will, which burned upon the beach, have been quenched by its uprising tide. Each man in Christ can point to himself as being in some degree the fulfilment of this mighty boast.

Newness of life.

THE practical manifestation of apprehended truth in respect of the believer's union with Christ in His Resurrection is the entirely transformed character of his life. Liberated from the power of all that belongs to the grave he walks among men as a new creature indeed. All things have become new to him and in him. He is a living testimony to the reality of the living Christ. And every day is an Easter Day to him whose life is one with the life of the Son of God.

The life of the believer proceeds from a new source. It is never the product of any personal energy or mere moral resolve. Its well-spring is the eternal Christ. Because He lives we live also; and through our lives His character and energy are manifested. This life is eternal, not merely in its duration but in its quality. "Death hath no more dominion over Him,"—nor over us, since He fails not. The Divine source of the new life is never impoverished.

The life of the believer is new also in its aim and direction. Since Christ liveth "unto God," so are all His imparted energies directed God-ward in His people. They can no longer live unto themselves. Their centre, as well as their course of life, is permanently shifted; and Christ Who is their life is the sustaining impulse of their aim to glorify God. Such newness of life is, in the nature of the case, conspicuous in a world out of whose life God as a fact and factor of power is practically excluded. It is the crowning distinction of Christ's disciples that they are essentially unlike the world, as the risen Christ Himself is unlike it.

Who shall deliver me?

THE darkest hour is that of self-discovery. When the man who has fancied himself free awakens to find himself fettered and in the grip of a law against the power of which he is morally and spiritually impotent, he knows the very bitterness of death. Enlightened by the law of God, and uplifted by the law of his own desire, he discovers himself enslaved by the law of sin in his natural disposition to yield to its working. It is the groaning of an almost hopeless heart which cries: "Who shall deliver me?" Wherever that cry is heard, however, there comes also the grand proclamation of freedom in Jesus Christ in answer.

Deliverance from the bondage of sin can only come to men by a new leadership and under a new law. As the lead of Christ is accepted, and His method of life adopted, the dynamic also of His own life is imparted and experienced. Only so are fetters broken, bondage overcome, and life liberated into fields where noble endeavours await the enfranchised soul.

Let it be clearly understood, however, that Christ's deliverance comes to no man apart from the co-operation of his own soul. He does not and cannot bless any man apart from his own determination. To do so, indeed, would be to make men but victims of another and greater force. His purpose is to make them victors; and hence it is that He lays claim upon every half-sleeping and deteriorated moral force and says to the prisoner: "Follow thou ME." And as he follows, he is led out into the open and finds himself strangely empowered to face his old foes.

The law of the Spirit of life.

IN order that the sense of God's indwelling may constantly be experienced by His children there are conditions which must faithfully be observed. It is a commonly accepted fact in the world of natural phenomena that if the law of any power (e.g., steam, electricity, etc.) be obeyed, that power can be utilized as desired. This has its parallel in the things of the Spirit. For if the law which governs the Spirit's operations be but carefully apprehended and obediently followed, His power as a result will be manifested in and through the law-observing soul.

This law of the Spirit may be phrased in two words—*obedience* and *dependence*. For it is ever to "them that obey Him" that the Holy Spirit is given. Primarily, obedience is necessary in regard to His teaching about our own lives. For since His work is to make us holy it follows that He reveals much that is extraneous, and also points out much that is lacking, in them. Only so could holiness in its negative and positive aspects be realized. In regard to the one He calls for utter and immediate renunciation. In regard to the other He enjoins the obedient appropriation of faith. Thus His sanctifying work within us progresses by continuous revelation, renunciation, and reception. Dependence also upon His power to co-operate with our weakness in these respects is the law by which every enduement is governed. It means a careful use of all that ministers His grace to the obedient life—prayer, the study of the Word of God, and the fellowship of His people. These are the ordinary channels by which He reinforces His people's efforts unto the realization of the ideals He sets before them. Neglect of them is a breach of this law, and is a certain forerunner of loss of power.

Hath not the potter power over the clay?

THIS illustrative interpretation of the mystery of God's sovereignty is an echo from the experience of the prophet Jeremiah, who, in the house of a potter found a parable of life. It at once silences the doubt and unbelief which challenge the disguised divinity of every inexplicable inequality of life,—whether in the national experience of Israel or the individual experience of the Christian believer. At the same time, it is an inspiration to the weak and self-conscious one to trust God. For it brings him reassurance that he is, despite his record and his frailty, still in the hands of the Almighty. The ultimate security of faith is in His power, and in the fact that it is directed by everlasting wisdom and love.

The Great Potter does not discard as worthless the marred vessel. Sin may frustrate His purpose and embarrass His cause—and does; but He will not be thwarted in His ideals for any life, even by wilful transgression. If a man be but surrendered to His Will, then in spite of his every past failure He will manifest power to organize victory out of defeat and to make the flawed vessel a thing of beauty.

Few of us entertain any doubt as to His power, though many of us make this, His own declaration, ineffective. For since "the clay" is not inanimate but wilful, He can only exert His transforming grace as we are yielded to Him, and as we are willing that He should. Committed to His strong hand, nothing is impossible. Out of the unlikeliest life He can make "a vessel unto honour," through whom a countless multitude may be blessed.

The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.

THIS is the ultimate assurance of all missionary effort. The universality of God's grace and power both vindicates and requires the proclamation of the Gospel to every creature. In all the experience of men none have ever sought Him in vain, nor found themselves excluded from the Covenant of His mercy by any disability, however created. It is significant to note that, earlier in the same epistle, it has been distinctly declared that there is "no difference" between man and man in the universal attitude toward God, for "all have sinned and come short." Here, too, there is "no difference" in His attitude of pardoning mercy toward all men. In this confidence His servants proclaim to the whole world the election of grace, in the confidence that He will not deny His Name.

The proclamation of such an Evangel necessitates an added assurance, on the part of all who would be His messengers, such as is alone afforded by personal experience in this very matter. Only they who are themselves proving the abundance of His mercy in their own lives, who are enriched by His imparted wealth, and who live both within calling distance of Him and in continual prayer, are qualified to declare the glory of His truth. They cannot but share with the common brotherhood of need the precious treasure they have found—for it is the possible possession of every man for the asking. This is alike the privilege and obligation under which we live. And this is the true greatness of life that He entrusts such a message to men.

I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to . . . Baal.

BY use of historical analogy the unsettling query as to God having cast away His people, evoked by the state of Israel, was answered. For God's character of faithfulness is involved in any such suggestion; and the apostle is jealous for His honour. His people may forsake Him, and thereby involve Him in the necessity of their discipline; but His purpose toward them is entirely unaffected. He is sovereign over all that exalts itself against Him. As in the day of Elijah, when the moral outlook was at its blackest and there were yet hidden and inconspicuous men who still revered and trusted Him, so in every age God has His faithful remnant. By them His worship is kept alive, and through them His purpose moves on unceasingly toward fulfilment.

How strong and frequent is the temptation to discouragement. Under the stress of opposition to the truth, and in the isolation which fidelity to God so often brings, we are apt to imagine that we are "left alone." It is difficult at such times not to lose the consciousness of communion with an unseen fellowship; but the one who does so, is in peril indeed. For a discouraged heart is of all soils the most favourable to the adversary for the sowing of his noxious seed of unbelief. Many an one has lost, through yielding to discouragement, far more than he could ever recover—and all because he failed to realize that he was not alone in His allegiance to God. To remember that we are fellow-members with all who, like ourselves, live and cleave to Him in solitary faithfulness, will save us from the greatest ill of all. It will establish us in the confidence of God for the further service which lies ahead.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

HOW significant is this climax to a chapter which deals with the practical things of the Christian life. It is as though the supreme test of the servant of Christ is his attitude toward evil as the assailed and the assailant, in resistance, and antagonism. It implies the certain peril from which none of us is immune; for the foe is persistent in his attack, and any unconscious yielding on our part makes ultimate disaster certain. This word, however, carries to our hearts the inspiration of a Divine declaration that evil is not invincible. God has made us for conquest; and we are not meant to be mastered by the force of sin. To live in fellowship with Him Who wages incessant warfare upon all that is evil, is to be empowered for our own ceaseless resistance "unto blood."

Christ's own method in the days of His flesh was ever to overcome evil by good. He dispelled darkness by radiating light. He disarmed hatred by manifesting love. He scattered error by imparting knowledge. And Calvary was His supreme expression of this victorious principle. Now in the life He lives through His people the same method of victory is manifested as they yield obedience to Him and so co-operate with His triumphant energies. They overcome the evil by the power of the good. But let us never forget that it is only possible for them thus to be "more than conquerors" through Him. The Christian life is not a philosophy. It is union with a Person Whose nature is to antagonize evil wherever it exists. That it *is* possible, therefore, to overcome by the power of His goodness is the promise certainly implied and assured in this command. And since it is given under the Royal Seal, it is binding upon us—and upon Him.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

THE inspiring incentive to all the holy activities of the Christian life is the certainty of the Coming of the Lord. While He is away it is as night to His people; and they watch for the dawn with the eager expectation of those who know that it will usher in their triumph day. In readiness for His Appearing their every reinforced endeavour is directed toward fitting themselves for all that that day shall bring.

Note the twofold nature of such preparation, embracing the spheres of personal life and of active service. The old garments are to be put off. Everything which speaks of the darkness of the old life is to be laid aside; for we are children of the Day. Then the armour, in which alone the Christian can go down to the field to engage in the conflicts of the Kingdom and thus help to hasten the return of the King, must be put on. Shining and strong, it is not worn for purposes of display but for the rigours of the campaign. The Christian lives not upon the parade ground but upon the field of battle. It is from thence he looks for the Coming of his Captain, and from thence also that he gathers spoils for His triumph.

The deepening consciousness that but little of the night is left presses acutely upon His people in his our day. That though to-day the air is full of thet noise of battle to-morrow will hear the Victor's song, is their uplifting confidence. And it is this certainty that most of all promotes their zeal in His service and encourages them to continuance.

Let not then your good be evil spoken of.

THE measure of Christian liberty is the weak conscience of others, for "no man liveth unto himself." Each of us needs to exercise care lest we should unwittingly harm the soul of another and make the faith of Christ difficult to him. It is the spirit of the Master Himself which honours all men and never despises the weakest; and as His servants we need seriously to cultivate it. For we live in a world which is constantly looking upon our professions of good, often with critical eyes, but sometimes also with wistful yearning. Many take their measure of Christ from that which in our lives commends itself to their judgment and conscience. On this account our responsibility for carefulness in regard to the quality of our witness cannot be overstated.

It is almost in the nature of irony to suggest the possibility of good being evil spoken of, and that owing to some defect in the character of the good exhibited. And yet how true it is to life! For Christians who are courageous are not always considerate. Zeal is not infrequently marked by self-sufficiency. Truth is not always spoken in love. Strength of character and amplitude of gift are sometimes marred by pride and discounted by lack of that gentleness which is naturally characteristic of Christ Himself. We need to remember that while God looks upon the heart men look upon the outward appearance of things; and that, for His sake, we dare not lightly disregard the possible consequence of their judgment. For we are at all times contributing influence toward the determination of their destiny.

Even Christ pleased not Himself.

IT is of the very essence of the Gospel that it commits the followers of Christ to the doing—or at any rate the attempting—of the impossible. Its entire ethic is expressed in the call to follow Him,—that is, to think as He thought and to do as He did. Its whole promise is of a dynamic sufficient to enable the feeblest and frailest of His people to reproduce His life in all its essential characteristics. Only in the light of this fact can we face such a task as that of living for an altogether higher purpose than the mere pleasing of ourselves. There is deep down in the nature of each one of us a disposition which, if allowed rein, can only develop an absorbing self-devotion which is the moral opposite of all that Christ stands for. The conquest of this tendency, and its replacement by the spirit of love, is the objective of every sanctifying process of grace within the surrendered life.

Nothing happens, however, in the realm of spiritual progress apart from ourselves. Co-operation with God is the active service of all who have pledged themselves His, and whose every desire and effort is re-inforced by His Divine energy unto victory. Thus it is that the ideal of Christ's own life is here set forth as being at once the reason and the strength of our considered selflessness. Because He thus lived it is covenanted that we shall live also. Let us then "consider Him," until the holy flame of desire to be like Him kindles within us, and we give ourselves up with undivided heart to this God-formed impulse. Then as the Divine enduement makes the Divine example a visible realization, our lives, like His, shall be full of that sacramental service which ever blesses a still needy world.

The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

THIS is to be the inspiration of every soldier as he takes his appointed share in the great conflict. Often he cannot discern any real progress on the part of the army of which he is a unit. Seldom is it given him to see what part his own share of the fighting is playing in regard to the concerted plan of the Captain under Whose orders all engage. The smoke and din of battle all around blind him to everything but the necessity for his own endurance. Often it seems as though the personal appearing of the Commander, Whose coming shall put the foe to flight, were long overdue. Still He does not come! Thus is the courage and loyalty of Christ's men tested.

Lest those in Rome—where the fight was fierce and the field not infrequently drenched with the blood of the faithful—should lose heart, this promise stands as the crown of all that has hitherto been declared to them of the counsel and comfort of the Lord, and of all that has encouraged them to wage the good warfare against the massed powers of evil. The Lord has not forgotten them. The fight is not theirs but His; and not a moment too soon nor too late will He give the final counter-stroke to the enemy. There can be no possible doubt as to the issue, nor as to their personal share in the victory. The Day shall declare that even what seemed at the time like failure and repulse was vital to the conquest; and then shall their joy be full. Where this certainty of His Coming is the present consciousness of His servants and soldiers they are invincible.

Them that are perishing . . . us which are being saved.

ULTIMATELY there are only two classes of men —those who are " perishing," and those who are " being saved " ; and the place of every individual in one or other of these divisions is self-determined according to his atttitude toward the Cross of Christ. On the one hand there are those who regard it as mere foolishness and treat it accordingly, rejecting its offers and making light of its demands. Such men are " perishing," daily losing power of perception and desire, and gradually deteriorating in moral and spiritual sensibility. On the other hand, there are those who find this message to be instinct with the very life of God. They trust its promises and fulfil its governing conditions ; and, in so doing, find a new strength coming into their lives, changing and transforming their tastes and desires, liberating them from sinful dominations, and, in short, recreating them. Such men are " being saved " as their lives are being increasingly brought under the sway of the power of God.

These are they who are the truly " wise." Accepting God's revelation of wisdom and power in Jesus Christ they become themselves the proofs of His reality, while the professed wise ones of the world are losing themselves in their unanswered demand for material signs or mental philosophies as the ground of faith. Christ is in every age set for the rise or fall of men. And there is always " a division among the people because of Him."

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

PAUL'S determination "not to know anything" among the Corinthian Christians "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" was no mere narrowing nor restricting limitation of his message to a recital of the bare facts of Christ's life and death. For to preach Christ in all His fulness is to touch life at every conceivable point. The Cross is but the Divinely-opened gateway to a pilgrim pathway which widens into ample fields of service and conflict as it leads men Godward and Heavenward. To preach the Cross, therefore, is more than a mere calling upon men to believe its message of forgiveness and pardon. It is to proclaim a new life, in which the principles of the Cross are applied to every interest, and in which loyalty to the Crucified is the governing and sustaining law. It is to proclaim the largest life and amplest service which men can ever know. For it is to call them to the inheritance of the sons of God.

No preacher needs any other message, for he can never exhaust the largeness of this; and he is both doing a disservice to his hearers and courting disaster to himself whenever he substitutes for it any other theme. Everything else lies outside the scope of his commission, and hence outside his covenanted enduement. To make use of the power of the anointing Spirit for any other purpose than that of winning men to the allegiance of Christ is to prostitute the holy gift—and to lose it. Spiritual power is the most delicate of all known forces, responsive only to entire loyalty and obedience on the part of the endued one. To depart from this attitude is ultimately to "become a castaway."

Carnal . . . babes in Christ.

THERE is all the difference in the world between the childlikeness which the Gospel of Christ commends and the childishness which it condemns. The Christians in Corinth, for instance, were merely childish. Their development had somehow been arrested; so that instead of being strong and vigorous, exhibiting spiritual qualities and characteristics, they were but "babes," carnally self-centred and with all the limitations of babyhood. Chiefly was their lack of spirituality evidenced in their dissensions and party factions, their jealousy and strife, and their easy conformity to the ways of the world from out of which they had been called by the Gospel. They were Christians—but carnal, strengthless, immature—just overgrown babies. On this account they could not be fed on the solid food of developed Christian truth, for they lacked power of apprehension and assimilation; and were indeed a standing contradiction of the faith they professed.

Have they no followers in the Church to-day? Are there not very many—perhaps even a majority—among us who, though calling themselves Christians, have little, if any, real interest in spiritual things; little, if any, spiritual discernment or heavenly-mindedness; little, if any, unlikeliness to the world which is frankly material in its ideals and aims? These "carnal" Christians are the most fruitful causes of weakness to the Kingdom of Christ, which suffers far more from the discrepant lives of its avowed adherents than from the enmity of its declared foes. Christ is wounded to-day mainly, if not entirely, in the house of His friends. What a shame is this to those who are set forth by the very fact of their profession, as being "God's husbandry . . . God's building"!

It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

THE true test of a minister of Christ, whose work is that of stewardship—that is of dispensing His gifts and riches to all to whom he is sent—is not his brilliant powers, nor his visible successes, but just his fidelity to the trust which Christ reposes in him. Often his work seems to consist of trifling things which cannot by any means secure the notice of others. But it is enough for him that it is the service to which Christ his Master has sent him.

It has been well said that "a little thing is a little thing; but faithfulness in a little thing is a great thing"! It is just such faithfulness which sets a man forth in the transfiguring light of Christ's approval as a true minister. Conscious of His good pleasure in him, he is at all times able to say—with no lack of becoming modesty and humility—to those who criticize his service: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." So long as he honestly brings the whole of life under the judgment of the Lord, and is assured that He is well-pleased with his stewardship, all other criticism is too shallow and meaningless to disturb him. The one secret of spiritual independence is spiritual integrity.

Let us then, as Christ's stewards, to which sacred service every disciple is called, make each day an anticipation of the Judgment Day. Let the light of eternity fall unhindered upon our every hour of time. Then, "if our heart condemn us not," we may with confidence look for the day of His Coming as for the Crowning Day when "every man shall have praise of God."

Purge out therefore the old leaven.

THE ritual of purging out the leaven was a conspicuous and important part of the Passover celebration. When the paschal lamb was annually brought into a Jewish household, all leaven—which was a type of sinful corruption and its communication—had to be put out; and complete abstinence from everything leavened was enjoined during the feast. So also with the Christian Church, both in its corporate and severally individual lives. Leaven and all it stands for—"the old leaven of malice and wickedness"—is entirely incompatible with faith in the great Sacrifice, and must be put away, whether discovered in persons or practices.

"The unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" must characterize the unending festival of Christian worship; or the Church becomes a reproach upon the Name of Christ instead of a reflection of His grace among men. While necessarily living in contact with a world in which sin abounds without shame—indeed not infrequently with positive glory—Christians are to be as unlike the world in this respect as possible. When the world is at its worst they are to be at their best. Purity of life must be safeguarded, at all costs, both in the individual and in the Church, or testimony for Christ is rendered invalid. Power for the work of the Kingdom, and for witness to the saving reality of the Lord, is always in direct ratio to purity of intent and aim. Upon the purging out of the old leaven depends the endowment of every new and vital force of the Spirit.

Do ye not know?

ANOTHER of the marks of the "carnal" life of the Corinthian Church was the spirit of disputation prevalent among the members. They quarrelled among themselves over such matters as the possession of property, and actually went to law one with another before heathen judges. This, Paul points out to them, is entirely at variance with their Christian confession. In the first place, such actions contradicted the brotherly love by which all who are Christ's should be bound together. Then they showed that the litigants had dethroned the spiritual ideals of life in favour of the merely material. Further, it outraged the rightful dignity of the Gospel, that its professed adherents should be unable to adjust differences which arose between them without invoking the intervention of a worldly tribunal.

Note how the apostle seeks to bring them to an understanding of the true inwardness of their actions by his query—repeated six times in this one chapter—"Do ye not know?" To him all such conduct as is theirs in this matter is so entirely opposed to the spirit of Christ, and is, at the same time, so subversive of the interests of the Kingdom, that he must labour to bring them to a right mind. For when Christ is supreme in any man's life worldly concerns are so entirely secondary as to be at all times subordinate to His interests and utterly negligible when brought into any opposition to His cause. This is a distinguishing feature of all true citizens of the Kingdom.

God hath called us to peace.

FROM the general question of Christian morality Paul proceeds to deal with the specific matters about which the Church at Corinth has asked his advice,—matters concerning the relationship of married persons; the problem of continuance where one person is a Christian and the other is not; and the relative values of marriage and celibacy.

Without going into details—which are of more or less temporary interest—it is to be observed how he brings the high obligations and ideals of the Christian life to bear upon these everyday problems. By him life is conceived as one complete whole. It can never be divided into mere unrelated compartments. The Spirit of Christ must control every relationship, every interest, and every aim of the man who professes faith in Him. Thus will his life become increasingly an expression of God and an interpretation of His ways. Marriage, and its sacred intimacy, will be regarded as an indissoluble bond whose sanctity must be indisputable. Existent differences between husband and wife, even in matters of faith, are not to be looked upon by Christians as grounds for violating the marriage covenant. If, on the other hand, a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving husband or wife, there is to be no recrimination nor attempt at coercion.

The general law covering such cases—which would not be uncommon in the Corinthian circumstances—is that "God hath called us to peace."

Take heed lest——.

THERE is perfect liberty for every believer regarding his personal actions, but he must always remember the governing law of love toward God. For there is a very practical consideration which needs to be borne in mind in coming to any conclusion regarding a debatable matter. The influence of any action, however lawful in itself, may be morally and spiritually disastrous to others. Hence the limit of Christian liberty must always be the "weak conscience" of others. The true Christian will have in mind the effect of any action not only upon himself but upon those also who may be emboldened by its influence to adopt courses which must end in their own entire perversion.

Paul takes very high ground when he says that one who sins—even though it be unconsciously—in this way, by an unregulated use of Christian liberty, is in effect sinning against Christ. The ground that he takes is in no sense too high, when we bear in mind the closeness with which Christ identifies Himself with the least of His brethren. For did He not say: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these, My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me"?

The actual questions which troubled the Corinthian Church are no longer with us; but there are other matters of a debatable kind which are still before us as Christians. There is, for instance, the question of conformity to the world in such things as theatre-going, adherence to changing fashion, gambling, dancing. These, and all similar questions, must be settled by each one in the light of his relationship to the Lord and his influence upon others. It is indeed but a poor kind of Christian life which is unwilling to submit to some measure of sacrifice in order to avoid putting a stumbling-block before one of the weaker ones "for whom Christ died."

All things to all men.

A BURNING love for souls Paul maintained right throughout his life. The passion of his heart to win others for Christ shone with unflickering flame through all the years of his service. He counted no sacrifice too great, no inconvenience too disturbing, if only he might win men to the allegiance of Christ his Lord. He accommodated himself to every sort of circumstance and person, always with this in view; and though he never hoped to save all, we know that he realized his inspired expectation and was enabled to win at least some.

It is just here that so many of us fail. We talk of becoming "all things to all men," and are prone to adopt only too entirely the speech and manners of the avowed people of the world, without always having as the governing motive of such accommodation a keen desire to save them. Indeed, it is not too much to say that sometimes the world catches us in its own current, and that we drift from our early profession and purpose under the unconscious spell of its influence. Paul never did. We find his every accommodation to the various classes of men with whom he was brought into contact was just the mighty throbbing of his passion for souls. So he keeps his own garments unspotted as he labours for their salvation.

All this can only be learned by us, as it was learned by him, in the school of Christ our Master. The worker who lives closest to Christ will come closest to men, and will inevitably communicate to them His life and love.

But God is faithful.

THE fact that watchful perseverance and vigilant unceasing effort are entirely necessary to the fullest realization of God's Will, both in life and service, is illustrated by the history of Israel. Despite their beginnings, so full of promise and privilege, and despite all the experiences of God's favour and blessing which enriched them in their wilderness march, how great was their failure. Those who left the land of Egypt, and crossed the Red Sea with joy and exulting song entirely failed to reach the Promised Land.

Their example is to be regarded as a warning by the Corinthians—and by us. Past blessing is never to be presumed upon; for no one, however rich his heritage, is secure from the possibility of falling. The devices of the adversary are many; and the unthinking, unheeding Christian is apt to be tripped up and overwhelmed with the debris of his own failure almost before he is aware of it. Yet how full of comfort and encouragement is the assurance that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"! He does not always deliver us *from* the temptation. But covenants always to deliver us *in* it.

There is always a way to escape when we are assailed and pressed by the foe, if we will but take it. Just as in the old enactment of the Cities of Refuge the way to any one of them was always kept open for a pursued man, so the way to the very heart of Christ is always open to His harassed disciple. However swift the assault of the enemy, more swiftly may the soul betake itself to Him and find both protection and reinforcement. Failure is never unavoidable.

Let a man examine himself.

IN order worthily to participate in the sacrament of our redemption we need to exercise sincere and rigorous self-examination. For we cannot partake of its benefits if there is anything between our souls and the Lord, or between us and our fellows. Sin must be confessed and put away entirely, or our showing forth of His death is but an empty mockery. Our relationship also with others must be adjusted, or communion—which means a partaking of something with others—is an utter impossibility. It is a sheer moral contradiction for one to be taking share in a sacrament in which it is implied that all partakers are one in Christ, if among the participants, there is anything which robs that profession of meaning and worth. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," may well be the cultivated consciousness of all as from time to time we gather for the Feast. For then we shall wash our hands in innocency; and so approach the altar of God in penitence and tenderness toward Him Who gave Himself for us, and in true fellowship and love toward all others who draw near to Him.

It must be remembered, too, that the sacrament is a pledge of service, and that the blessing of the Sanctuary ideally prepares men to live in the streets. If we show forth His death at the Table, we must show forth His life also in all our conduct, and down all the avenues of life. On this account alone it is urgent that "a man examine himself." For by the quality of life we either authenticate or defame the Lord Who bought us. Men expect—and rightly expect—those who profess Him to live beyond all reproach.

To every man severally as He will.

SPIRITUAL gifts are many and differ widely in their expression. They are bestowed upon each believer, not according to his faith or prayer, but according to the mind and counsel of God. He it is who gives to each of His children enduement appropriate to the service He designs they should accomplish. Hence, anything like pride, or regret, or envy can have no place in the lives of those who are "baptized by one Spirit into one body." To each has been given his own work, and to each the capacity to carry it out. The spirit and power thus bestowed on each believer are complementary, together making up the whole purpose of God for His Church.

The living bond which binds all together is the common acknowledgment of Jesus as "the Lord" —this is the true attestation of the indwelling Spirit of God. To each surrendered and yielded soul the gift of the Spirit is the necessary enablement to live under the Lordship of Christ, whatever that involves. To one it will mean conspicuous power of speech, to another outstanding ability of insight and wisdom, to another faith in that pre-eminent degree which makes prayer a power, both in the individual and in the Church. It should be then for each one the chief consideration of life not to become possessed of some one outstanding gift rather than another but to be assured that Christ has been definitely and deliberately crowned as Lord; and then to follow Him in the pathway of obedience. For His enthronement conditions and makes perfect our enduement; and the practical acknowledgment of His government will bring the present experience of His gifts.

The greatest of these.

THE greatest of all gifts is to have "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." And this is the possible experience and possession of every believer. Indeed, this is the proof and attestation of true and saving faith. For if a man has not love as a practical working force in his life, he has nothing. This is the grace which vitalizes and gives worth to all other gifts, to all efforts, and to all sacrifice. It casts a transfiguring light over everything, and identifies the commonest man with the Lord Whose name he bears.

Just as the many colours of the spectrum unite in forming one bright ray, so do patience, kindness, humility, guilelessness, purity, sincerity, and unfailing persistence unite to form this love which is the greatest of all gifts and graces. Every experience of its power to sweeten and sanctify life is only to be regarded as a prophecy of complete victory and satisfaction in that day when Christ shall come again and be known of His people, not as in a mirror but "face to face."

We cannot have too constantly or closely in mind this fact—that apart from love as the moral mainspring of everything, activity and service count for nothing in the eternal scale of values. And, lest we should be discouraged by this knowledge, it is well, too, to bear in mind that love is never original on our part. It is always responsive to, and reflective of, the great love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. "We love Him because He first loved us"; and we love our brother also because we first love Him.

Let all things be done unto edifying.

ONLY two ritual directions are given in the New Testament regarding public worship and the conduct of the services in the Church of Christ. One is: "Let all things be done unto edifying"; and the other: "Let all things be done decently and in order." Whatever helps toward the building up of loyal service to Christ has the Divine approval; and whatever obscures this great end is, by the same token, condemned.

It is obvious that the ideal form of service is one in which all the members take individual part, each contributing something of ministry to the whole. Perhaps it is because this plan is no longer pursued in the Church that many of the gifts of the Spirit seem now to have been lost. Where every member of an assembly is filled and controlled by the Spirit of God, so that He speaks through one and another to the conviction, illumination, and edification of all, there is a fulness of blessing that is not possible as a general rule where the majority of worshippers are silent and where the whole of the ministry is committed to one man. What we have gained in order we have probably lost in effectiveness, both as regards inner life and outward witness.

But though the outward conditions have changed, we need to remember, as we undertake the obligation and accept the privilege of Christian worship, that the duty devolves, not only upon the minister but upon every worshipper, of contributing at least by prayer toward the edification of the whole body. It is when this fact is recognized that we shall see revival breaking out in our churches, and souls being brought into the Kingdom of Christ.

That God may be all in all.

HOW complete and far-reaching is the declaration with which the apostle crowns his outlined sketch of the programme of the Kingdom: "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet," in order "that God may be all in all"! Christ, Who has already triumphed over sin and death, is ultimately to achieve full conquest and undisputed victory over the whole universe. This declaration Paul bases entirely upon the matured meaning of His redeeming work. To him Christ is the Head of a new and victorious order of humanity—raised, indeed, from the dead in Himself, united to Him in all the enterprise of His cause, and eventually to bow in eternal submission with Him to the God Who is "over all, blessed for ever." There is, perhaps, no grander conception of the future glory of the Kingdom than this one, which may well inspire every believer to the utmost faithfulness of life and conduct.

Here, again, we need to remember that we live *in* the present *for* the future; and that the reign of Christ, which is the goal of hope and effort, is to begin here and now. How many things there are in life which are not yet "put under His feet"! How many tempers and dispositions, habits and possessions there are which do not own His control! Let us search our hearts and see to it that His dominion is increasingly comprehensive in our own lives. For it is only by these immediate victories that He moves forward to His ultimate world-dominion.

Now concerning the collection.

IT seems, at first sight, as though these words are in the nature of an anti-climax. From a consideration of the deepest and loftiest of all the Christian mysteries, with its crowning exhortation to steadfastness and service, to descend to an injunction about a mere "collection" appears almost inexcusably incongruous. But in reality the two things are in strict accord; for they are parts of the same whole.

Christian generosity in the matter of financial support of the work of God is an integral part of holiness; and the place deliberately assigned to it by the apostle casts an illuminating light upon this often-neglected matter. It is as though giving is to be elevated in the Christian mind from a mere irksome duty to a joyous privilege. The loftiest truths of the Faith are to be as truly the inspiration of unselfishness in this respect as of work and service of a more active and obvious sort. Our giving is generally far too spasmodic and haphazard to be worthy of the cause; and perhaps nothing is more needed than a return upon the part of all to the practice here enjoined of regular and systematic offering. When our creed influences our conduct in such a practical matter as the willing gift of our silver and gold "as God hath prospered," the world will more readily believe our Gospel; and the Church will be untrammelled in her work and warfare.

Taking this conjunction of the "resurrection" and the "collection" in its widest meaning, it appears to be indisputable that a parsimonious and ungenerous Christian is a positive contradiction of the fundamental Faith. The one who withholds from the Lord the measure of wealth with which He has entrusted him is actually denying Him. Loyalty to Christ means always and everywhere liberality to His work.

That we may be able to comfort.

THERE is an element of vicariousness in all Christian experience. Every experience, both of affliction and comfort, is directed toward the full equipment of the believer for Christian service, which is the mediation and interpretation of God to other lives. Only as we, in our own affliction, are comforted and uplifted by the Divine grace shall we ever be able to communicate that grace to others who are suffering in like manner. There is a sense in which the whole human family is a brotherhood of need; and only by fully entering into the common experience of men and himself proving the reality of the Evangel, can the servant of Christ effectively help and bless them.

It is on this account that Paul regards his sufferings as borne for the sake of the Corinthian Christians. Whatever these sufferings were—whether (as has been supposed) serious illness, or violent opposition and persecution—it is evident that they were severe, bringing the apostle at one time even to the very gate of death. But just as, in Nature, sweet perfume is distilled from very unpromising plants and flowers, so in these very things is learned the old lesson of man's weakness and God's might. Hence this song of deliverance in all tenses—past, present, and future—which voices the confident faith that the God Who has been hitherto so faithful will henceforth also safely shield and guard His child.

It is always part of Paul's inspiration—and ours also—that he is leading the way for other feet to follow, and is making life more explicable for those who, like him, have to walk through darkness to the place of triumph and thanksgiving. This is the true glory of life for us all; and its highest value.

Maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us.

THE servant of Christ must himself be a man who realizes the guided life as one of real triumph and victory. He is never without his conflicts and personal encounters with the evil one; but such is the consciousness of God's power communicated to him in his union with Christ, that in all things he is made "more than conqueror." By contact and in communion with Him he assimilates something of the fragrance of His life; and this unmistakable redolence is the strongest part of his influence upon men. Just as a sweet perfume penetrates the atmosphere and irresistibly compels attention to its source, so is the holy life a silent challenge to whatever is evil. Its striking contradiction of all that is unworthy inevitably draws men's attention to the Lord Who is its Author and Sustainer.

Further, the true servant of Christ realizes that he stands between the contrasted destinies of those among whom he witnesses. The only alternatives, according as men accept or reject the Gospel, are life and death. And this knowledge invests the life of Christian service with solemn seriousness. One thing it will certainly do for us—it will for ever prevent us from adulterating the Word of God in order to ensure for ourselves any personal gain, as some dishonest shopkeeper may adulterate his goods in order to increase his profit. To live always under His conscious oversight is to make such insincerity an impossibility. The grace of God manifested in Christian servants of this pattern will, inevitably, soon repel the modern charge as to the lost power of the Gospel.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.

THOUGH always conscious of the high honour which is his as Christ's ambassador, Paul is strikingly free from all boastfulness. He has no illusions as to his own worthiness or competence, and whenever it is necessary to speak of his work, as a true servant of Christ he is always careful to disclaim any personal confidence apart from Him. If there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, it is alone attributed to the Lord Who has made him an able minister of the New Testament. He is always eager to disclaim any idea of self-sufficiency or superiority, so that to Him may be ascribed all the glory of the work and its outcome.

In view of all that Christian service entails for every one of us, how blessed and reassuring is the proclamation that " our sufficiency is of God " ! The Bible indeed holds no larger word than " sufficiency," which is elastic enough to comprehend every need, every circumstance, and every contingency. There is no overplus in the Divine enduement, which is, nevertheless, always enough for the direct service to which it is appropriate. On the other hand, there is no lack. With every entrustment is the certain bestowal of all that is necessary for its faithful fulfilment. It is this fact that transforms the energy of the weakest servant into a ministry of light and life. If a man will live close enough to Christ to hear His call to the work, he will, at the same time, hear His whispered assurance of grace sufficient. And the sense of His imparted strength will expel every hindering consciousness of self-weakness.

Not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

THE man who has seen Jesus Christ can never be guilty of preaching himself, nor of setting himself forward in any way. For that vision has brought a knowledge of his own worthlessness and a sense of condemnation which for ever preclude reference to himself in any other sense than that of a bond-man of Him Who redeemed him. Those who are His bond-slaves become the voluntary servants of all men for His sake. Such an attitude disarms all suspicion and hostility, and opens the door, as nothing else could do, for the exercise of the ministry of the Gospel.

Moreover, this consciousness of Christ-possession brings with it also an ever-increasing realization of personal weakness; and the conviction that the treasure of "the knowledge of the glory of God" is entrusted to a very fragile earthen vessel which has of itself neither honour nor value. This is both the condition and the consequence of the Divine favour. No man is really going to be used of God to enrich other lives by the distribution of the Divine riches, who is not himself so entirely humbled in the service as to be self-forgetful and willingly lost sight of. God will not give His glory to another; yet He will, and does, graciously entrust the interests of His Kingdom to the weak and feeble souls who are willing to give Him the supreme place in heart and life. Such men may be, and often are, entirely overlooked by the world and the Church. But they will be honoured indeed by their Master—and this is honour enough.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 9 (R.V).

We make it our aim.

IN one pregnant sentence Paul has voiced the ambition and aim of every true servant of the Lord: "We make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him." This determination is strengthened by the consciousness that each must one day stand before the judgment-seat, where the criterion of all life and the standard of all judgment shall be just this—whether any life has been lived for His pleasure or for its own.

How entirely does this determination to subordinate everything to the consideration of God's pleasure cut the Gordian knot of all life's difficulties and perplexities. There is never any ambiguity nor uncertainty about the things that please Him. Conscience is an unerring guide in this matter, enlightened as it is by His Word. Indeed, to the one who truly seeks to live in communion with his Lord, pleasing Him becomes a matter not so much of deliberation as of instinct.

Nor must it be imagined that it is a difficult thing to please Him. Love is never hard to please. It is gratified and gladdened by the smallest activities and sacrifices dictated by responsive affection; and hence the life which pleases God is the life which is itself fullest of unfailing pleasure. For every one of us, too, this is the open secret of independence. The servant of Christ does not consider the pleasing of men, which so often involves him in snare and bondage. To be assured that the Lord is gratified, is at once the sufficient reward of the servant and his entire liberation from every other consideration.

Come out from among them, and be ye separate.

THIS affectionate exhortation to the Corinthians is as much needed in our own day as it was in Paul's. The world has invaded the Church so successfully, and the line of demarcation between the Church and the world has been so well obliterated, that it is often difficult to distinguish the one sphere from the other, at any rate, by the lives of those who dwell in them. Just as the Temple of old was separated from all secular purposes and devoted to the worship and service of God, so the life of each individual Christian is to be set apart. True fellowship with God is an impossibility to the one who is seeking his pleasure and profit in the doubtful and often sinful things of the world. And where that fellowship is broken or interfered with, the holy effluences which should flow from each living temple, bringing a consciousness of God into the world which so largely forgets Him, are impossible. It is when the Christian is as unlike the world as possible that he has greatest influence upon the world.

Qn the other hand, conformity to its often ultra-foolish fashions and changing conventions soon brings Christians into a bondage which precludes all Christ-glorifying service. Too long has the Church tried to reconcile its own ideals with those of the world,—to its own undoing. Here, if anywhere, is the reason for much of the impoverishment and powerlessness which to-day makes its professions a byword. Spiritual power is always the direct result of a close and unworldly following of Christ on the part of Church or individual. Wherefore, "Come out . . . and be ye separate"!

Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

THE Christian life is no mere passive acceptance of truth, but an active translation of truth into practice. With increasing light there comes inevitably to the Christian soul a discriminating consciousness with regard to the good and evil things in his own life. Having also, as the foundation of his faith, the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God, he unquestionably renounces all that tends to defile, and strenuously resists its efforts to regain a foothold in his life. This is, at any rate, the negative side of the practice of holiness; and one which we can never afford to overlook or neglect. Just as sin is entirely incompatible with any professed love of God, so that creed is of little worth which does not inspire those who profess it to strenuous sincerity in this respect. There is a love which casts out all fear; but there is also a love which inspires fear. And this is the fear of God in which those who love Him live. For such there can be no compromise with evil; nor can any quarter be given to the foes of Christ.

In all this, mark how careful Paul is to avoid severe fault-finding and harshness. It is his intense love of souls which inspires his every ministry toward them. For though he regrets having caused them sorrow by the things he has had to say, he rejoices that the sorrow has issued in blessing to them; and to encourage them, how generously he adds the assurance of his confidence in them! In all this he affords us a noble example of Christian service, and an illustration of how completely the surrendered life of the servant may reproduce the Spirit of the Master. Remember that the like duty rests upon us, of turning the possible into the actual by undivided devotion to the Lord Whose name we bear.

They . . . first gave their own selves to the Lord.

THE question of the collection for the poor at Jerusalem affords Paul the opportunity of giving the Corinthians an exhaustive treatise on the grace of Christian giving, which he opens with an extended reference to the generous action of the impoverished Macedonian churches. This generosity has been all the more noteworthy because of their poverty, and is held up as an example; as indeed it is. The outstanding feature in their case is that it all proceeded from the gift of themselves to the Lord. The greater gift is a fountain from which all else flows. Having given themselves to Him, they could not, and did not withhold their possessions.

This is the true order of all Christian liberality. God Himself does not ask men to give toward the support of His work who have not first given themselves in faith to Him; for before all things He seeks the hearts' devotion of His people. This secured, all else follows in natural sequence.

The apostle is careful to point out to the Corinthians that their spiritual gifts of faith, utterance, knowledge, and diligence are to be either confirmed or contradicted by their attitude toward material things. Consecration has a cash value, now, as then. When a man has grace enough to put his means gladly at the disposal of the Lord for the support of His work, the sincerity of his love to Christ is proven. Let us see to it that we "abound in this grace also." For it is sadly lacking in this our own day.

All grace abound toward you.

PAUL is constantly affording glimpses into the secret of his own personality and influence. And every view we get through his letters is of the grace of God at work in and through him,—and similarly available to all believers. How comprehensive and abundant is his declaration that "God is able to make all grace abound toward you ; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work"! This at once puts within the possibility of each one that full service of Christ which alone is a fitting response to His love. Whether the service be, as in this primary significance, that of giving to Him the use of the gifts with which He has entrusted us, or the work of witnessing for Him by life and lip, or the innumerable other activities which are open to all His followers, here is adequate enduement. Ponder well the amplitude of it. God's grace producing *all* sufficiency, in *all* things, and at *all* times! What a rebuke this is to the poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian life! We are apt to live as paupers when we should live as princes. We eke out a precarious existence on a mere pittance of grace, when all the time the riches of God are at our disposal.

It is noteworthy, too, that grace is only bestowed upon us that we may in turn bestow it upon others. "Use it, or lose it," is the supreme law of all spiritual equipment. In every life the outflow must equal the intake ; or the supply will be cut off. The ineffectiveness of any Christian life is no reflection upon the grace of God ; but is rather always to be understood as an evidence of imperfect consecration. For God has pledged Himself to His people's obedience.

Even so are we Christ's.

FROM the great heights from which Paul has been speaking, it seems a descent to this chapter which consists mainly of a vindication of his apostolic authority. He is conscious of a violent opposition against him, the influence of which is imperilling the well-being of the whole Church. It is on this account, therefore, that he makes spirited reply to the charges that have been hurled against him. They have, for instance, charged him with cowardice, and with assuming a position to which he had no title; and he defends himself with no uncertainty. Far greater issues are involved than his own personal reputation. For himself he cares nothing; but for Christ's cause everything.

There are times when, in this same interest, we as Christians have to defend our reputation, which is always a difficult thing to do without violating the spirit of love. Controversy there must be, though it should never be raised by us. When, however, we are unwillingly involved in it, Paul gives us here an example as to how it should be conducted—"by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." To make Christ our supreme Lord, and His interests the paramount concern of life, is to make the personal side as insignificant as possible. The commendation of the Lord is better than any number of dialectic victories to His servant. For we are not seeking to win arguments, but souls; not to commend ourselves, but our Lord. If this be borne in mind, we shall conduct even the controversies which may be forced upon us, as part of our Christian service.

In labours more abundant.

IT is well for any man who is challenged as to his claim to be Christ's servant if his service is of the sort which itself silences the challengers. The ultimate proof of Paul's apostleship is in the things which he has suffered for the sake of the Gospel. Nowhere else does he so fully or eloquently portray the great episodes of his life. He speaks apologetically, for he recoils from anything like boasting as he puts forward the things he has suffered as attesting the reality and sincerity of his devotion to Christ. His claim to be His servant is substantiated by the record which he sets before them under the solemn seal that "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not." He is not afraid to submit himself to the most hostile scrutiny of men. For he has long since learned the secret of living in the fierce light of God's own truth.

Such a life, crowded with peril and persecution, harassed by all kinds of opposing forces, and suffering pain from which the bravest heart might well shrink, is a marvellous testimony to the constraining love of Christ. Had all this been undergone for mere personal gain it would have been heroic; but gladly borne, as it was, in order that the blessings of the Gospel might come to those who otherwise would be without them, it is positively sacramental.

If anything proves the reality of our profession of love to Christ, it is just our willingness to suffer in His service, our desire for the salvation and blessing of others, and our recklessness of cost. For all this is manifestation of the Spirit of Christ; which, if any man has not, "he is none of His."

My grace is sufficient for thee.

THE crown of Paul's self-defence is not the service he has undertaken, nor the sufferings he has borne, but the intimate fellowship with God which he has enjoyed, and which has been the impulse and inspiration of his life. In these verses he recounts the most intimate and the deepest experiences of his soul. The constant infirmity, which he styles "a thorn in the flesh," so troubled him, that thrice he besought the Lord that it might be taken away; and the answer, which he records as being divinely-given, has been in all ages one of the sweetest notes of the Evangel to similarly harassed souls: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Not merely is this a promise but a Divine fact, something which is already and eternally established, and of which the believer has but to avail himself.

God does not always deliver us *from* pain and suffering; but He does deliver us *in* the things which trouble. And this, after all, is a higher deliverance, and always calls forth the triumphant song which broke from Paul's heart. God has larger ways of answering our prayers and fulfilling our hopes than we can ourselves suggest to Him. He can transform the thorn-pain into the triumph-song and make an unremoved infirmity a channel of unimagined inspiration. Weakness gives God His opportunity. Let us, therefore, not rebel at our continued consciousness of it; but rather bring it to Him, that He may put forth His power in and through it. For to His grace and greatness in this very respect there is no end.

Examine yourselves.

PAUL brings this second epistle to a close by a final appeal to the Corinthian Christians. He fears for them lest, while apprehending the things of which he has written, they should fail to realize them as verities of experience. Their danger, like our own, is the ever present one of taking things for granted, and of aimlessly drifting in a current of general Godward intention, which, however, leads men into a sea of indecision, uncertainty, and ultimate loss. The business-man who does not carefully and seriously look into his affairs is likely to become sooner or later a bankrupt; and as in business matters, so it is in all matters of the soul. These things do not take care of themselves. Nothing but resolute honesty with ourselves will save us from self-deception at all times.

The closing salutation and benediction brings the letter to an end on the highest note of all. Grace, love, and fellowship form together a trinity of the gifts of God, by which such a life as has been outlined may be lived to His glory. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ"—sufficient for every need; "the love of God"—unchanging in every circumstance; and "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost"—adequate in every situation. These comprise all that the believer can ever need in time or eternity. How blessed it is to know that He may be "with you *all*," irrespective of present personal character and without regard to the former failures which have marred life's record. None is excluded from participation in this fulness, but all may live in its power to the highest glory of God.

That He might deliver us from this present evil world.

THUS comprehensively is declared the purpose of Christ's death. By His own submission to the world's wrath He has for ever called out from the world's vain and specious seductions those who link their lives to Him. The love of this present world is deep-rooted in the heart of every man. We naturally adopt the prevailing colour and fashion of our environment; and, apart from some miraculous power entering into life and changing disposition, there are none who would of themselves escape the snare so commonly and cunningly laid for our feet.

Deliverance from the world must not be understood as meaning that Christ enjoins upon His followers any sort of immured and sheltered life, in which all contact with defilement is avoided for the preservation of their own purity. On the contrary, indeed, He sends His disciples into the world there to win others to His allegiance. Nor can we understand the full meaning of the purposed deliverance except in the light of this commission. The fact is, Christ takes the world out of our hearts, and then sends us into the world with a glorious independence of all that it holds apart from Him. He expels the old world-love of pleasure, ambition, wealth, ease, by the might of a new affection—for Himself; and then He inspires an altogether new love of the world—the yearning, self-sacrificing love of the soul-winner, which becomes the impulse of every enterprise and the inspiration of every obedience. When the love of the Cross, with all its mighty energies, gains possession of our hearts, then, and then only, are we delivered from this present evil world, with which we have henceforth not less to do, but more. For before us lies the task of proclaiming the Gospel to every creature.

I do not frustrate the grace of God.

WHAT a high conception of life is this—that it is planned by God; that every obedience to His known Will is a fulfilment of His purpose; and that every wilful failure is, by the same token, a frustration of His intention! The mere thought that any selfish or wilful indulgence may foil God's planning is, surely, of all restraints the most powerful. As in a complex machine every cog in each wheel is so important that if one slips the whole machine is put out of gear, so in the interrelated thing which we call life. Upon each one of us—even the smallest and weakest—the work of the whole depends; and He Who has planned the whole counts upon our faithfulness. Such is His trust in the forgiven soul that He confides the far-reaching interests of His Kingdom to redeemed men.

It is significant to note that this declaration on Paul's part is closely connected with his testimony to the certainty of Christ's indwelling. It is as though to say that the great business of the believer is to be true to every responsibility of this holy alliance; to follow unhesitatingly the dictates of the Lord Who reigns within; to accept unquestioningly His guidance, and be true to the impulses of His Spirit—all of which will be found for us in the written Word. The greatest question we can put to ourselves—and we should do it daily—is this: "Am I worthily or unworthily receiving the grace of God?" The issues involved are eternal; and the answer will be found unerringly recorded in the realm not of our beliefs but of our conduct. And just here, where Paul was victorious over every opposing influence within and without his own life, we too may overcome.

Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

THIS is one of those large declarations of truth which more than most challenge and condemn the existent state of things in the Church of Christ. Looking out upon the many divisions among God's people and made aware of the spirit mutually animating them, and then coming back to the simplicity and obvious meaning of this word, we see how far the modern Church has drifted from the Divine intention.

Recognition of this truth, that all believers are one in origin, and made still more truly one by redemption, by the new birth, and by the animating Spirit by Whom life is sustained, is a vital part of the Christian ethic. The one who is unwilling to regard as his brethren —not in theory but in practical fellowship—all who love the same Lord, feed on the same Bread, engage in the same service, and look for the same Appearing, denies the faith he professes and contradicts the entire spirit of the Gospel.

This declaration does not commit us to attempted uniformity either of vision or of practice. There is a world of difference between uniformity and unity; and it is the latter which is so clear a fact to New Testament writers as to be fundamental to all their thinking and work. Uniformity may be an evidence of death. Unity is the product and characteristic of life—of life in Christ. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren," is not a mere ideal but a present fact, which it is our positive duty to incorporate into all our Christian life and activity. It is when brethren dwell together in unity that the Lord commands His blessing.

Because ye are sons.

CHRIST became the Son of Man in order that we might become the sons of God. The Holy Spirit has been given in order that we might live as the sons of God ought to live. Just as at the beginning we received Christ by faith and so became sons, so by simple faith we must receive the Holy Spirit in all His fulness that we may be endued for the task of Christian living and Christian service. Only as He possesses and guides us can we live worthily as those upon whom such manner of love has been bestowed that they should be called the sons of God.

The fulness of the Holy Spirit is not God's gift for any favoured few of His children. It is the birth-right-portion of all; and not only is His indwelling power desirable but necessary also. Apart from Him, indeed, the life of Christ can never be so reproduced in us as to make us indubitably His brethren in the eyes of the beholding world. The family likeness ought to be distinctly recognised in every one who names His Name; and it may be, if we will but claim our inheritance. Every failure in this respect is not on God's part but on our own; for "He hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son"; and only unwillingness upon our part can hinder His mighty working. Let us, then, yield up the entire government of life to Him, ask in faith upon the warrant of His Word for the great Gift, and dare to believe that He does here and now fill the willing and obedient heart. Then let us step out in simple trust and obedience to do the next obvious duty, of whatever sort it is. And His sustaining and sanctifying energies shall become a living experience.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory.

FROM the heights upon which Paul has been discoursing on the fruit of the Spirit and its development in the lives of God's children, it almost seems a descent to such an exhortation as this. Yet at a nearer view it only serves to show how close to the facts of life the Spirit of God kept the writers of the New Testament. For the desire of vain glory is one which, in some shape or form, is a temptation to most; and even among those who truly desire to serve and follow Christ there is often found a subtle spirit of self-seeking which actually cancels every true spiritual desire. Praise of men, honour of position, pursuit of popularity, glory of visible success, are all things against which those who follow Christ have to contend. But, thank God, over just such things He can make His people "more than conquerors."

There is a glory which comes from above of which every one should be desirous; and which is never vain. It is the glory of true and whole-hearted service of the Lord, which brings honour to His Name although it may receive little recognition from others. It is glory enough for the one who loves Him supremely to be in His service at all; and to know that his work has been blessed and used is his highest and completest reward. The distinguishing mark of a true disciple is his utter carelessness with regard to such things as the world highly esteems, and his constant cultivation of those graces of character and life which most closely identify him with the Lord.

The marks of the Lord Jesus

THE proofs of Paul's devotion to Christ were the scars which he received in His service. These he looked upon as the brand-marks which attested Christ's ownership of His bond-slave. He refers to them in refutation of the charges of insincerity brought against him by his enemies, and as a proof to the Galatian Christians of his apostleship. But there is also a deeper meaning in them, both for him and for us. For it is a law of life that devotion to anything, or to any one, brands a man. The student who is devoted to some master will re-echo his voice and reproduce his spirit. The man who is devoted to material success soon comes to bear upon his life the marks of his passion. So, too, it is in the service of Christ. Love to Him renders us sensitive to impression. We inevitably become like Him of Whom we constantly think, with Whom we frequently converse, and to Whom we submit every choice. Thus do His disciples come to bear the marks of the Lord Jesus. And this is the great need of the world to-day—to see the witnesses of Christ branded with something of His own character.

Among these marks are His dominating purpose of obedience to God's Will; His entire disregard of worldly consideration; the supremacy of the spiritual and eternal in His life; and above all the passionate love for men, in which He expressed His love for God. These things, when seen in the lives of His people, are irresistible in their attractive force.

An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

THIS is the ground of confidence and authority of every Christian worker, that he is an apostle by direct vocation—the call of Jesus Christ has made him such. He holds his commission not by human arrangement but as a part of the Divine purpose. The deepest consciousness of his soul is that Christ Who saved him has sent him out as His servant. Such a man will, like Paul, be at once self-depreciative and self-assertive. For he is always conscious of his own weakness and unworthiness; and, at the same time, is always conscious of his authority as Christ's ambassador. These are not contradictory characteristics but rather complementary. For the one who comes into intimate and redeeming contact with the Lord Christ will always realize within himself a growing apprehension of his limitations and shortcomings; but he will likewise always realize the wonderful inspiration of Christ's trust in forgiven men.

Further ground for confidence is in the fact that his apostolic call is "by the Will of God." Sure of this fact he is secure from all evil and undaunted by all the difficulties of the work. The might of God is always the protection of His messenger. Nothing can by any means harm him while he makes it the supreme business of life to fulfil that holy Will to which he has surrendered himself. And daily the approval of God lifts those who sincerely serve Him above all care of the disapproval of others. In many a dark hour, when the visible results of service are disappointing, and when to the depressed soul comes the subtle suggestion of the enemy that it has been a mistake to launch out on such a profitless and fruitless life, it is the saving strength of His anointed.

EPHESIANS ii. 22.

An habitation of God.

THIS is perhaps the highest ideal and figure of the Christian life with which the Word of God furnishes us. Each redeemed one is to become a very dwelling-place of the most High. Into the weakest life He Who is almighty strength deigns to come; in the life whose failures are most obvious He Who is perfect Holiness deigns to dwell. And it is this fact—the life of God in the soul of man—which saves from the power of sin, actually translating all the conceivable possibilities of Christ's riches into indubitable realities of experience.

The implication of such a word as this is an exhortation to the cultivation of fitness. If God is to dwell in my life, I must make the dwelling-place, as far as in me lies, worthy of the Divine Occupant. There are renunciations and displacements which must be effected if the home is to be worthy of the Guest; and in respect of these, each energy of the soul is reinforced by the Holy Spirit. His mighty co-operation with every sincerity of purpose alone makes it possible to "cleanse every filthiness of flesh and spirit," and to "perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord." What a sanctifying awe does this sense of God's indwelling bring into life! It is at once a controlling restraint and constraint, the explanation of every activity and the inspiration of every obedience. And every indwelt life is a prophecy of the eternal glory that is laid up for the children of God; when, in the great temple of redeemed humanity of which each is a living stone, He shall dwell throughout Eternity.

The prisoner of Jesus Christ.

IN reality Paul was the prisoner of the Romans; and yet he does not regard himself as in any sense their captive. For behind the power which has incarcerated him is the permissive Will of the Lord. He is there because Christ has Himself appointed this experience for the discipline of his soul. He has chosen this place as the sphere of his present service. Hence there is no repining, no fretful care nor anxiety about relief, and no petulance nor impatience at the long-delayed deliverance. For everything which has befallen him only expresses his Lord's love and purpose.

Surely this is a lesson which each one of us needs to lay to heart. We are all prone at times to regard ourselves as the victims of circumstance; whereas the fact is that nothing reaches us except through the protective Will of God. If we are His, it follows that our lives are entirely His concern. If we are prisoners, we are prisoners of Jesus Christ! If we are freemen, we are the Lord's freemen! For the great and governing fact of life is that we are not our own but His!

Then, too, just as his Roman imprisonment became one of the most fruitful periods in Paul's life of service, so will it be with us. In every unkindly and unpromising environment we shall find that, by the Will of God, we are set as His witnesses and that there is fruit to be garnered there which could not ripen otherwhere. As from Rome there came forth these words to enrich and bless the whole Church in every age, so out of the depth of our experience shall be born a witness to Christ which shall bless and sanctify other lives beyond all our thought.

EPHESIANS iv. 30.

Grieve not the holy Spirit of God.

THAT it is possible to lose an experience of the power of the Spirit by wilful disregard of the simple laws which govern His abiding, is indeed a significant warning. Alas, many who were once "endued with power from on high" do apparently go back to the old condition of powerlessness and uselessness, and stand out as warnings to us all, who, in faith and obedience, have received the great gift of the Holy Spirit. For He is a sensitive Guest Who is easily grieved; but Who, on the other hand, is also easily pleased. If it is remembered that His object in all His dealings with us is to make real our identification with the Lord Jesus, then it will be seen that what grieves Him is any unwillingness on our part for the actual process of heart-conformity to His image. He is grieved, for instance, by any departure on our part from the attitude of entire surrender and consecration to God. He is grieved by any unwillingness to yield up those things of aim or habit which He condemns. He is grieved by any disobedience to His calls to service, and by the employment of any methods in His service other than those He directs. He is grieved by any wilful seeking of self-glory as the outcome of His power. He is grieved by any deliberate choice of things unclean, and by any conduct which is habitually contrary to the known Will of God. He is grieved by any neglect of the Word of God and prayer, and by any unfaithfulness to the implicates of the fellowship of His people.

Let us therefore cultivate the most sensitive relationship with Him, lest we lose that which nothing can replace.

Be filled with the Spirit.

NOWHERE does the Word of God promise a once-for-all fulness of the Spirit to His people. His fulness is to be continually renewed to them; and it is in this sense that this plain command must be understood. God never entrusts His people with an inexhaustible spiritual capital upon which they may draw permanently. Not once, twice, or thrice, but daily and hourly we need a renewing of the Spirit; and just as often as we bring our empty vessels to the wells of Salvation shall we be re-filled and go on our way rejoicing. We are apt to forget that the walk to which we are called consists of a series of similar steps of faith, and that life itself consists not of one great span but of a succession of moments. Let this fact be borne in mind, however, and then we shall not fall into the error of trying to live to-day's life on yesterday's enduements. By a moment-by-moment faith we shall have a moment-by-moment renewal of the blessed Spirit, Whose power is our enablement for a moment-by-moment obedience to the Will of God.

In the life of the Lord Jesus there is a concrete example for us of all this. At His Baptism in Jordan the Spirit descended upon Him, anointing Him for the work for which He had come. But this crisis of experience, which was the inauguration of a new era of life, did not exhaust the Father's giving nor the Son's reception. The testimony of His entire life is that God gave not "the Spirit by measure unto Him." His portion was unmeasured fulness continually renewed; and so likewise is ours. To this command: "Be filled with the Spirit," we may at all times respond with the prayer: "Lord, fill my every emptiness and need with Thy plenitude." And according to our faith it shall be unto us.

Take . . . the sword of the Spirit.

THE people of God are called to the soldier-life, and their calling includes a full equipment for all the conflict which is involved. Each separate piece of the armour represents the Lord Jesus in a different aspect of His work for us; while, together, they from the perfect fulness of the salvation with which He is able to save "to the uttermost." To "take the Sword of the Spirit" is to appropriate and to use the written Word in the Spirit's power—for it is the Spirit's Sword and not merely the Christian's—as the Divinely-forged weapon for defence and aggression.

The temptations of the Spirit-filled believer are as many and as insidious as were those of the Lord Himself; and we can only hope for victory as we follow His method in the fight. He used the Word as his Sword in parry and thrust. Clearly it was His thrice-repeated "It is written," which put the adversary to flight.

In this our day there is much profitless argument as to the Divine character of the Word of God; and, in the nature of the case, argument and counter-argument are as unconvincing as they are inconclusive. What are really needed are exhibitions of the power of the Word which establish beyond all dispute its Divine origin. The visible extension of the Kingdom in men's hearts through the use of the Sword of the Spirit is the only convincing answer to sceptics and scoffers. Do not argue about it—preach it! Do not merely display the jewelled hilt or the flashing blade of the Sword, but thrust through the enemies of the Lord with it! Its effect will establish its divinity.

Not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

THE necessity of being identified with Christ in actual suffering is looked upon by Paul as a positive privilege. It is a gift of God by which His people are themselves directly enriched and His Kingdom indirectly extended. Such suffering is of varied form; but in the last analysis it is always, in some sense, the consequence of the world's unabated hostility to Christ and His Cross. Faithfulness to Him must always involve His disciples in the reproach that fell upon Him; and never do they so effectively bear testimony to the reality of His life in them, as when they actually rejoice that they are made partakers of His affliction.

All this is not to say that we are to seek suffering for its own sake, or to provoke enmity by unwisdom of action or contempt of the foe. We are to take up the cross, but never ourselves to make it. As it fashioned a cross for the Lord, so will the world crucify His followers, if in life and character and message they are unmistakably identified with Him. For the world has not changed one whit, despite all its civilization, religion, and boasted culture. At heart it is entirely opposed to all that Christ stands for. Though its method of expressing hostility may have changed, its actual attitude and purpose is the same to-day as in His day. In the home, in social and commercial circles, and even in the professed Church, those who follow Him wholly always do so through tribulation. But what an inspiration to the persecuted and cast-down disciple to know that his sufferings are "on the behalf of Christ"!

Fellowship of the Spirit.

PAUL'S argument for practical holiness of life always proceeds from the greater to the less. The eternal verities, whereof all have had some measure of experience, is made the foundation and sustaining force of all human relationship and activity. The communion of the Spirit is entirely independent of merely external observance and ordinance, even as the Spirit Himself is free as the wind which bloweth where it listeth. The word "fellowship" actually signifies intercourse or partnership; and its use in the New Testament is always expressive of that vital union with God, and hence with one another, into which we have been called by the Gospel. It is the secret of all fruitfulness in life and labour, and on this account it is most often the sphere of severest conflict.

There is nothing which the devil so unceasingly combats as the desire of the people of God to enter into, and to abide in, the "fellowship of the Spirit." He devises a thousand means to prevent those seasons of heart-intercourse with God which are an absolute necessity; and often successfully substitutes even the most praiseworthy Christian activities for that true communion in which strength and guidance and grace can alone be obtained. How many well-equipped workers, and how many well-organized forms of work, are suffering to-day from a low vitality entirely due to neglected communion with God. How strong and fatal is the delusion that we must go on working, when all the time something is wrong which nothing but the "fellowship of the Spirit" will put right. It is not without deep meaning that the apostle suggests an interrogation—"*If* there be any fellowship of the Spirit"!

I follow after.

THIS is the declared secret of Paul's magnificent service and dauntless energies. He has seen in Christ an ideal of personal life which can only be reached by the utmost strenuousness of soul, always in co-operation with the Divine Spirit. He realizes that within himself there are things to be overcome, and others to be acquired. The land of his pilgrimage and ours is one of "far distances." Its heights are only to be reached by those whose aim is single and whose energies are all devoted to this end.

Christian character is not a sudden acquisition but a steady accumulation. Mushroom-growth has always something of the abnormal about it, whether in Nature, or in the higher moral and spiritual realm. Many Christians are in danger of taking their obligation to follow after holiness, "without which no man shall see the Lord," far too lightly. Their aims are altogether too low and too easily reached. But not so Paul.

The sincere follower of Christ has his powers of vision constantly cleansed and quickened, so that he beholds an ever-elevating standard both of life and service. His attainment in the one, and achievement in the other, only serve to emphasize the greater things of which they are but a partial realization. With this consciousness comes a quickened inspiration also to follow hard after Him Who is Master of his heart. Such a life, at once unresting and unhasting, will, by its very seriousness of purpose and singleness of aim, realize the Divine reinforcements. And so strengthened it never fails to witness to the world in convincing fashion of Christ's power.

The Lord is at hand.

THERE is a twofold sense in which this declaration may be interpreted for the inspiration of faith's activities. Interpolated as it is amid exhortations to holy and worthy living, it is a reminder of the near presence of the Lord to help His feeble followers. When the difficulties of witness, the embarrassments of obedience, the claims of duty, and the consequences of faithfulness press all too hardly upon any one of us, it at once revives failing courage and renews the fainting heart to remember that He is not far from us. We have but to turn to find Him actually at our side, laying His hand of power upon ours of weakness, correcting by His wisdom the mistakes of our folly, and encouraging by His sympathy the heart which is downcast by a sense of worthlessness. The sustaining strength of knowing that we are never alone, and that He enters into every experience, forever forbids unbelieving fear.

In another and not less real sense, this word applies to the crowning hope of His people. His Coming, for which they long, will not for ever be delayed. Their patience may be stretched almost to breaking-point; but yet He is "not slack concerning His promise." The brightness of His Appearing will yet dawn upon the darkness of their discouragement. The actual hour may not be known; but the living fact is hidden deep within the heart of each true disciple, and is the germ of every energy and aim. With such an incentive, and such a destiny as His Coming declares, none of us need ever be cast down as though the Lord had forgotten.

That in all things He might have the pre-eminence.

THIS should constitute the ideal of the worship and work of any Christian Church. Where Christ is pre-eminent nothing will be permissible in worship which derogates from Him. Ritual, music, eloquence, while all having a certain use, will never be allowed the supreme place if Christ gets His rightful position. Nor will anything be permissible in work undertaken in His holy Name which does not add to His glory. No mere mission of amusement or education, of philanthropy or culture, will absorb the energies or exhaust the resources of any Church in which He is truly the Lord. Every plan will be directed toward the creation of this same ideal of His sovereignty in others. And that Church will not have long to bewail the absence of revival. It is true to-day as in pre-Pentecostal days that "the Holy Ghost is not yet given because Jesus is not yet glorified."

But chiefly in regard to its personal significance this desire of the apostle needs to be laid to heart. The humbler as well as the higher activities of life are to be brought under His sway. For all things, whatever be their nature, are ennobled and delivered from the unworthy and sordid by their surrender to Him. There is no so-called "sacred" and so-called "secular" in the lives in which He rules. His glory fills the whole temple, falling alike in transfiguring light on the smallest as well as on the largest concerns there. It is this co-ordination of the entire life to His government which alone brings true peace and happiness.

Rooted and built up in Him.

THE Christian life is at once the product of an inward growth and of an outward energy. But each of these is "in Him." As the tree draws through its roots life-sustenance from the ground in which it is planted, so does the believer draw constantly from Christ all the grace that is necessary for the maintenance of life. The fruit also of a tree is just the gathered sap which has passed through trunk, and limb, and branch, and has been transformed there by the secret processes of Nature. Thus it is in the life of a Christian. The riches of Christ's grace pass through the medium of his own life, first meeting his needs and stimulating his entire being, to reappear as the ripened fruit of holy character, which at once attests his discipleship and glorifies the divine Husbandman under Whose care it has been brought forth.

As a building is entirely dependent upon the foundation which gives it stability and strength, so, too, is the believer dependent upon the grounding of his faith upon Christ. This assured, all his energies are then to be directed toward building his life according to the plan of the Great Architect. Stone is added to stone, and storey is placed upon storey, as He has designed. Thus the higher the building rises the more surely does the builder testify to his trust in the firmness of the foundation. It is not by singing the praises of its security, but by resting the weight of an ever-enlarging edifice upon it, that the foundation is glorified. God has laid the Foundation, and "none other can be laid than that is laid." But let it not be forgotten that while this is His part, ours is the responsibility of building upon it. So, when the top-stone of the building is laid with shoutings of "Grace, grace, unto it," it is then that the Foundation shall be most honoured of us all.

Seek those things which are above.

THE teaching of the Word with regard to the Resurrection is twofold—firstly as it concerns our Lord Himself, and then as it concerns all believers in Him. In the former light it is a truth to be believed by us; and in the latter an experience which we are to share. The present personal significance of Christ's Resurrection is that those who are identified with the Lord and made one with Him in His death and burial, are to be like Him also in resurrection beauty and power. In this respect the true aim of the Christian is an upward one. "Things which are above" are of supreme consequence to him. His spiritual conceptions and aspirations are expressed in the ordinary activities of his life before others, and he makes all its necessary duties but stepping-stones to the attainment of the higher realities. To realize that we are "risen with Christ" lends to all life a sanctifying force which manifests itself in every sphere.

The man who has entered into the mystery of Calvary, with its triumph of Christ over sin and death, has learned to estimate the "things which are seen" at their true worth. He possesses a new viewpoint, and judges things by altered standards of value. He is content to lose the world, in whatever measure such loss may be necessary, just because he has gained that which eternally satisfies. Thus in himself he is the greatest of all apologetics. The testimony of his life is worth all the academic treatises on the Resurrection which were ever written; for its argument is unanswerable. For while he is never other than fully satisfied with the perfections of his great Ideal, he never for one moment pauses to be satisfied in himself. And the very struggle to "seek those things which are above" develops in him latent possibilities and capacities; so that each step upward is into fuller liberty and more perfect manhood.

Redeeming the time.

THERE can be no uncontested slackness in the life of the true servant of the Lord. The issues of his service are so tremendous that none can light-heartedly trifle with them. The number of those who are doing the work is so few that none can be exempted. Above all, the opportunity of impressing men into His faith and love, while it abounds on every hand, is yet a daily decreasing one; for the flight of time is rapid and cannot be recalled. This is the fact which adds increased urgency to the Gospel commission. Opportunities of contact with souls, which are always God-made, must be bought up and redeemed to the highest of all use. For they do not recur even to the most repentant.

To what energy in the seeking and winning of men to Christ should this word inspire us! On every hand we are daily coming into touch with those who need the saving Word of Life. All our social and commercial correspondences with the world are marked with this Divine intention. God purposes that by their use we should so commend Christ as to evoke desire for Him, and lead others to His feet. Alas, how many such opportunities do we let slip! The unimproved occasions when we might speak the saving word—but do not; when we might stretch out a hand to the help of other lives—but selfishly withhold it; when we might shine as guiding lights to some struggling one—but prefer to hide our own light under the bushel of self-pleasure or convenience. These form our greatest condemnation both now and in that Day when the work of life shall be passed under review. He alone of Christ's disciples is ready to meet Him when He comes whose being is on fire to use to the utmost for Him every opening which life affords.

In much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

WHAT a strange conjunction is this. It seems anomalous and almost inconsistent as a description of the Christian life that in the same person affliction and joy should meet and blend; and yet how true is it to experience. Each one who sincerely receives the Word of God, and earnestly endeavours to apply its principles and precepts to the conduct of life, inevitably comes into conflict with his own nature and with the world. He is confronted with inner disabilities and outer enmities; and very soon learns what affliction means. It may press upon him in the form of material loss, shattered alliances, sufferings of body, or struggles of soul. But whatever shape it assumes it is always to be regarded as a confirmation of faith's sincerity.

The other side of the truth is that to those whose faithfulness brings them into affliction for the Word's sake, a compensating joy is ministered unfailingly by the Spirit within them, which lifts them triumphantly over every wave and billow of adversity into the calm haven of peace. Circumstances are powerless to affect it. For its well-spring is God Himself. It is no mere mental or emotional elation, dependent upon changing moods and influences; but a deep and settled sense of God's good pleasure, in the light of which every untoward experience loses its angry look and its power to disturb. This is the joy which filled Christ's life, and became His legacy. His disciples only realize it as they share also in some degree the sufferings He bore.

Ye are witnesses, and God also.

PAUL is confident regarding the consistency of his conduct because his whole life is lived under the conscious scrutiny of the Lord. The one who daily appeals to His judgment has no fear in submitting himself to any judgment of men. Life co-ordinated to His Will means such scrupulous care in regard to thought, and word, and action, that it can always stand the most searching test to which friend or foe can submit it. It silently and modestly, yet confidently, challenges inspection. This is not to say that any such life is flawless, or without mistake; but it does mean that nothing contradictory to the spirit of the Gospel professed and proclaimed is consciously tolerated when recognized. Such a life is its own convincing commendation.

There is a sense in which this word may be taken as a self-reminder, that, while the eyes of the world are upon us, they see only the external, which after all is not the entire man. God is also our witness; and He sees within as well as without. We may often pass muster with others, when all the time there is that in the realm of motive or secret habit which God disapproves. When this is so, appearances may be preserved before men; but fellowship with God is hindered, to the impoverishment and ultimate shipwreck of life. Live as under His eye, remembering always His discriminating discernment, and all will then be well and worthy. As the outer life witnesses to His salvation, "all that is within me" shall then likewise "bless His holy Name."

Unblameable in holiness.

THERE is a world of difference between being blameless and faultless. It is a commonplace of experience that no man, however sincere his effort and worthy his aim, ever succeeds in realizing his ideal. Every life, even the most morally and spiritually successful, is flecked with flaw, which, if not readily revealed to human eyes, is certainly not hidden when the light of God is brought to bear upon it. But even so, every life, however weak and faulty owing to deficient apprehension or application, may be at the same time quite without blame, in that its controlling motive is the glory of God.

"Unblameable in holiness"—which is the Divine standard and expectation—tests the quality of our motive and the force of its expression. It searches both the nature and the extent of our consecration to the Will and service of the Lord. Has He undivided possession and control of us? Do we seek before all things to be true to Him, as far as we apprehend His purpose? Can our love and loyalty be depended upon? These are some of the honest questions by which conscience unerringly arrives at its judgment, and assures us of unblameableness or its opposite.

Let it always be borne in mind, in this connexion, that the one who is by grace thus humbly conscious of being unblameable before God, will one day also be presented before Him faultless. But not until we see Him as He is, shall we be thus entirely like Him. Meanwhile every day that lies between should record the growing harmony between our high calling and our Christian character.

Taught of God to love one another.

THE maintenance of unity and fellowship between those who are Christ's servants is of utmost importance to the cause of His Kingdom. In the deepest sense of all we are members one of another. There is no such thing as an isolated Christian life; for each one who is vitally joined to Christ is, in consequence of that union, vitally joined to all who are His. The attesting mark of this unity is the all-animating spirit of love. The Master Himself laid it down indisputably that men should recognize His followers by their mutual affection. In view of the conditions of this our day, and the greatness of the issues involved in this recognition, it is of supreme moment that in God's own school this lesson of love should be learned.

It has been the reproach of the Church in all ages that the very opposite of love has characterised her internal relationships. Nor is it difficult to trace the responsibility of this contradiction to its individual membership. There also it must be remedied. This means that each of us must personally draw near to God as scholar to teacher, that the lesson may be learned. He only can impart, not merely the theory, but the spirit of the self-effacement, humility, forbearance, patience, and unselfishness, which are love's constituents. This not infrequently necessitates the refining ministry of fire, in which alone dross can be consumed and the spirit refined. But even so, God Himself is the Teacher; and He may be depended upon to take the kindest way with each of us, consistent with the attainment of His aim.

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

THE importance of this injunction is deduced from its setting; for it is here found among the governing conditions upon the observance of which all the sanctifying influences of the Spirit are dependent. It is a precept which cannot be disregarded by any believer without serious loss. Hence the imperative force with which Paul enjoins it upon this infant Church as one of the prime laws of its spiritual life and efficiency.

The moral quality of any action is estimated not alone by its effect upon the doer but by its influence upon the beholder. Nothing is clearer in the range of Christ's own teaching than His warning against the responsibility of causing another to stumble. The knowledge that this may unwittingly be the effect of our unconsidered or ill-considered actions invests life with a steadying seriousness of purpose, which, almost more than anything else, identifies His people with Himself. Unconscious influence is one of the strongest forces of life. We are always starting or strengthening springs of moral action in the lives of others who are emboldened by our example. And when it is remembered that the consequences to them may be the determination of eternal destiny, the need of observing this injunction will be well understood. Not only from evil, but from all that looks like evil; not only from things condemned, but from things doubtful; not only from acts, but appearances—are Christians to separate themselves. And in regard to these things the enlightened and sensitized conscience ever waits upon sincerity of purpose with clear and unmistakable discrimination.

Glorified in His saints.

IN all his teaching concerning the Second Coming of Christ Paul is intensely practical. The glorious Hope is never divorced from high spiritual and ethical obligations. He aims at the creation of a passionate imperative to true holiness by his declarations of the Lord's Appearing. For His glory, and nothing less, is the ideal toward which all the events connected with Christ's Return move. In that day He is to be manifested in the fulness of His glorious life in those who have been His servants and followers during the time of His absence. Every bud of promise which their lives have previously put forth is then to be realized in glorious blossom. As transparent media, delivered at His Appearing from all that has hitherto, even in the sincerest life, interfered with clear reflection, they will then show forth to the world the Lord in all His beauty. This is the sustaining hope of all who work and wait for Him.

Meanwhile, however, this is also the standard of life for His people, toward the realization of which every spiritual energy must be directed. Life is their great opportunity of magnifying Him before men. The world is inclined to form its views concerning Christ, and to adopt its attitude toward Him, from the impression which the witness of His people makes upon it. He is, even now, being either glorified or caricatured in them. When He is in supreme control as their unquestioned Lord, the conscience of beholders is inevitably carried, even though their sympathies may not be secured. For reality is easily recognized and always approved. Thus is the coming of the Kingdom being hastened or hindered.

Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

AMID all the disturbance and distraction which is clearly foretold as precedent to the Coming of the Lord, this word is set for the heartening of His people. With the brightness of a twin-star shining in a black sky it sheds a guiding and inspiring light upon their pathway toward the sunrising.

This twofold gift of consolation and hope effectively meets the condition of those who are frankly distressed and dispirited because of the present apostasy. Without over-confidence in settling the place of this present age in the scheme of prophecy, it is but literal truth which asserts that the apostate spirit holds widespread sway. To the one who loves the Lord, His Word, His Day, and His work, the fact that He is so largely denied, His Word despised, and His Day degraded, causes an overwhelming sadness and an unspeakably anxious foreboding. It sometimes seems as though the flickering light of faith would die out entirely despite all the activity of the living Church; and as though the spirit of evil must ultimately triumph.

It is for such an hour that this ministry of God is covenanted. He assures us that the sun may be clouded but it is not eclipsed. All the forces are not on the side of evil. The horizon of fear may seem perilously close; yet, beyond it, is the unchanged certainty of the Lord's conquest and the land "that is fairer than day." This is the ministry of the Spirit to the sorely-tried believer. It demands, however, that he shall live, even in the midst of these conditions, in close touch with his Lord. And it also implies the certain possibility of his so doing.

The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.

THERE is no greater need in the life of any than that of heart-direction. At the same time there is nothing which we have so little power in ourselves to accomplish. It is in the heart that all joy and sorrow, all good and evil, find birth; and this is the glory of the Gospel—that the Eternal Spirit undertakes the responsibility and control of the surrendered life at the very springs of its energy, emotion, and activity.

He directs our hearts into the love of God by constantly revealing His great love to us—the love which planned our salvation, the love which gave Jesus to die for us, the love which has had long patience with us and has dealt with us in such persistent tenderness. As we realize it, we cannot but become dissatisfied with all other loves. And our spiritual longings are recognised as His invitations to draw yet nearer to Him and to know Him better. But let us remember always that to be thus directed into the love of God is to be directed out of the love of the world, out of the love of self and sin, out of the love of having our own way and of ordering our own lives. To be directed into the love of God is to be directed into a life of self-abnegation and self-forgetfulness, and into a life of engagement with our blessed Lord—His Word, His work, Himself.

This promised direction of heart pre-supposes submission of heart. It is only by following the leading of the Spirit of God, yielding to His impulse and constraint, that we may come into the love of God as the one anchor-ground of faith, and as a responsive devotion also which liberates from every bond and impels to every service.

For this cause I obtained mercy.

THE pivotal centre of Paul's life was the experience in which he received the mercy of God as a free gift, immediately complete in all that it conveyed to him and carrying with it the certainty of constant renewal as the needs of life increased. We measure time in two great periods—B.C. and A.D., which have their counterpart in the life of every true Christian. All that falls under B.C. is to be repented of, forgiven, and blotted out. Everything dates from the obtaining of the mercy of God in Christ.

The purpose of salvation is always clearly before the apostle. God has saved him in order to make him a pattern, to show forth in him all the love and long-suffering of His own heart. His life is to be a lens through which others may get clear and saving apprehension of what God is in His purpose toward men. How splendidly did Paul yield himself to this service! As light passes through a stained window, and is seen in the colour thus imparted, so through the medium of their own experience does God's light fall upon the world through each of His people. The great significance of redeemed lives is that the personality of each one is capable of giving an unique interpretation of Him to others. The united witness of all His people on this wise presents Him in saving beauty to the entire world. How easy it is to lose this grand conception of the purpose for which mercy has been received! How close to our hearts do we need to bind His Word! And how carefully ought we to live, lest our failure to show Him forth aright should tend to the undoing of the faith of any!

Good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.

THE Christian's responsibility for intercession is, in some degree, determined by the providential arrangement of his life. It is God Who has made us members of a nation; and hence the obligations of citizenship are of His ordering. The one who seeks to serve Him can best fulfil his duty to the nation by prayer. Not that prayer is ever to be regarded as a substitute for the fulfilment of obvious responsibility. There is practical obedience and service which every Christian is bound to make on behalf of his own land. But while he shares this in common with all men, he can do also what others cannot—for he has access to the Throne of God.

Too often Christians are inclined to take their citizenship lightly, and to leave patriotic duty to those of less-avowed spiritual interests. It is well that we should be reminded that God is the Lord of peoples as well as of persons; and that the affairs of nations, as well as of individual lives are of deep concern to Him. His people ought to be the most loyal and the most devoted of all citizens. Their prayers should be a valuable asset beyond all the material resources of any land; for by their means they can liberate into common life forces which make for the righteousness which alone "exalteth a nation."

Kings and those in authority have heavy responsibilities to fulfil, serious judgments to make, and almost impossible burdens to sustain. Their need of Divine help is greater than is commonly imagined; for the issues of their actions are so influential. And the humblest believer in the land can—all unconsciously to them—help them to fulfil God's purpose.

holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

A GREAT danger into which in every age God's people have been prone to fall, is that of regarding faith as in some sense a substitute for righteous living. Indeed, not a few have affirmed that concern regarding personal conduct is a contradiction of faith, and falls under the condemnation of dead works! This has not been the least part of the undeserved reproach which has fallen upon the Gospel, and indeed upon the Lord Himself.

Such an attitude is entirely contradictory of the whole spirit of Bible-teaching. There is no contradiction, but the rather a vital connexion, between objective faith and the subjective assurance of an unoffended conscience. The imputed righteousness of Christ is an unspeakably precious truth. It must not, however, be held apart from the equally sacred truth of His imparted righteousness, wrought out in the believer as the Spirit reinforces his every obedient energy. For while faith assures our standing before God, it is our state before the world which is our witness to Him; and it is with this side of things that conscience deals. While zealous, therefore, for the place of the faith in the Christian life, we must be equally zealous so to order ourselves in all details of conduct and conversation that conscience bears clear witness within and life maintains unmistakable witness for Christ without. In the final reckoning of things, a Christian's faith is not what he *holds* but *what he is*.

Give thyself wholly to them.

THE Divine jealousy is seen in the demands made upon those who would be God's servants. No division of heart is allowable in regard either to their instruction or activity. The Word will not yield its treasures to the mind which is not wholly given to its study. Service cannot accomplish the desired end except as its impelling energy is that of an entirely devoted heart. Obedience to God is not an addendum to an otherwise ordered scheme of life. It is the very soul of life itself. Consecration always and everywhere means concentration.

That this is no arbitrary law is attested by the fact that the same spirit rules in most ranges of human interest. For instance, the one who would excel in any branch of art or science must give himself undividedly to its pursuit. The man who seeks to make a success of business is compelled to throw his every energy into it. Anything, in fact, that is worth while possessing is not gained apart from entire devotion. This is the common law in both the natural and spiritual worlds. How clearly is its working seen in the lives of those who have been most useful in the work of the Kingdom of God! From Paul himself, with his avowal "I count all things but loss . . . that I may win Christ," down to David Livingstone, whose declaration, "My Jesus, my God, my life, my all, I dedicate my whole self to Thee," has also been a life-inspiration to many—the line stretches in unbroken succession. The lesson of each life is the same, emphasizing this open secret of all fruitful discipleship: "Give thyself wholly to these things."

Doing nothing by partiality.

NATURAL preferences very often oppose themselves against Divine purposes. Especially is this seen in regard to Christian duty and service. Too often intimations of God's Will are met by perverse inclinations which prove the stronger. Partiality is, however, one of those things which the true disciple must sincerely lay aside. Every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, or we can never effectively secure the progress of His cause and the increase of His Kingdom. It is not ours to choose nor to refuse when indications of the Will of our Master are made to us.

How vividly is this principle of impartiality illustrated in the lives of those through whom God has accomplished most. "Thou shalt go to all to whom I shall send thee," has been the unquestioned law of life to all such; though, indeed, not a few of them have had to be brought to this place by experience of failure and breakdown in their own self-chosen courses. It is only in the place of God's appointment that His servants can claim His enduement. All work done in His Name is not necessarily His work for any of us. If any personal activity, however admirable in itself, is not vitally related to the whole of His Will, it has a distinct recoil upon the one who engages in it. "Doing nothing by partiality," but everything by direct revelation and Divine reinforcement, is the key to that acceptable service in which no cause of shame shall be found at the Appearing of the Lord.

Keep that which is committed to thy trust.

PAUL'S anxiety as to the future of the work he was soon to hand on to Timothy is gauged by the nature of his disclosures to him. It is upon the character of God that he seeks to establish his confidence. The greatness of His grace is seen in nothing more clearly than in His confidence in forgiven men. To those who might seem to have forfeited all claim to reliance He entrusts the most important responsibilities. The one who knows the Gospel, and has experienced its power, is put in trust with the Holy Word. He is to be its mediator and interpreter to the world. In him is vested the privilege and obligation of a witness which affects the ultimate destinies of men. It is this fact, more than anything, which imparts serious steadfastness to every one who realizes the value to God of his life.

Individual significance is emphasized in the personal note of this exhortation: "That which is committed unto thee." Quite apart from every other believer, and yet in vital union with every other one, God commits to the saved man that which concerns His own honour. The consciousness that if he fails God Himself also fails in some sense, makes it impossible to regard lightly the implicates of redemption. The Divine commission is by no means easily fulfilled. There are foes strong and implacable whose constant aim is to wrest the standard from the one who holds it. There are influences strange and seductive which tempt to slackness and to the relinquishing of what sometimes seems a hopeless contest. But to the resolutely faithful disciple is ministered a ceaseless and sufficient flow of the Divine Spirit. He keeps his trust "by the Holy Ghost given unto us."

I have believed . . . I have committed.

HEREIN is disclosed the foundation upon which the apostolic life of energetic faithfulness is built. To Paul, faith can never be a mere mental assent to propositions or statements of truth. When he recognized Christ as the Divine Saviour nothing less than entire consecration and devotion to Him could express his belief. In its last analysis faith must always be a similar self-surrendering union with God. The one who is able to say "I believe," cannot avoid the logical outcome "I belong." For Christ is a living Person, and His claims are in no sense academic but actual.

The life entirely committed to Him is the only life in which the experience of His faithfulness can be known. His power to keep—that is to guard—the soul from assault, the will from fitfulness, the inspiration from failing, is limited to the sphere of His control. It is in the uncommitted part of any man's life that all failure occurs. We are defeated, it may be, in the realm of thought, of ambition, of relationship with others, or of material concerns, only because that specific thing has not been brought under the sway of Christ's sceptre. Paul had once for all committed unto Him every realm and range of his being. Consequently his persuasion of Christ's power is entirely unaffected by his experience of suffering; even though, as he writes this testimony, he is in a prison. Such an one is invincible. For above everything else he knows Him to Whom he belongs, and to Whom all power has been committed.

Meet for the Master's use.

SUCH is the ideal of all who realize their call to God's service. The Blood which cleanses also claims them. The service of God, however, cannot be carried on by unclean hands. The Living Water cannot be conveyed to the world in unclean vessels. There must be ever-increasing correspondence between the character of His servants and the aims of His service. Hence the obligation to put away everything that tends to render life unuseable as a vessel in the Royal Household. Before everything, all true service is an activity toward Christ. It is the Master Himself Who condescends to need and to use redeemed lives for the carrying out of His purpose. It is His hand which fills the vessel with the Heavenly treasure, and pours it forth upon the thirsty and unclean world to quench and to cleanse. And just because we are thus to be for His use it is necessary to cultivate fitness.

What an encouragement it is to know that He uses vessels of varying size and shape, and that the smallest and poorest may, for some purpose of His own, more entirely meet His need than any other! We cannot all have the splendour of the finely-chased golden goblet; but we can all be of use to the Master, as vessels of common delf, if we are cleansed and ready to His hand at all times. It is the one who is the readiest, and upon whom He can lay His hand at any time, who is most likely to be most useful. Let the Master's need encourage us, then, to the utmost care.

Wise unto salvation.

AMONG the many figures under which the nature of sin is declared none is more striking than that of folly. All that it suggests of wrong choices and courses, with their inevitable consequence, is full of unmistakable warning. For folly ultimately means lostness, just as wisdom ultimately means salvation; and it is part of the glory of the Evangel that foolish and lost men may become wise and saved, by giving heed to the Word of God. It is through the Scriptures, as through a lens, that the light of God's love, in its purpose of recovery and power of redemption, shines upon the sin-darkened way. It is through the Scriptures that the voice of God speaks to the heart and woos back the wanderer. It is through the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is revealed as the Sin-bearer bringing pardon, the Substitute bringing justification, and the Saviour bringing love.

This is the abiding value of the Word of God. In the Old and New Testaments alike, Christ is its theme. By prophecy, in history, and through ordinance He is so set forth that none who are looking for Him can fail of recognition. He is the final message of God to a world lost in its own folly.

Seeing that this is so, nothing can transcend in importance the adoption of a right attitude toward the Word of God. To turn from the Scriptures, as from something less than the Divine revelation, is to turn from every hope of salvation both in its present and final meanings. To obey them, love them, and incarnate them in lives of faithful discipleship is to be truly wise, and eternally enriched and rewarded.

2 TIMOTHY iv. 10.

Having loved this present world.

SPIRITUAL tragedies are often recorded in a single sentence. Practically all that we know of Demas is the fact of his desertion under the power of an influence stronger than that of the claim of Christ. He stands for ever as a warning to those who begin with the Son of God, but allow themselves to trifle unresistingly with the seductions of the world which crucified Him. The choice of the world is never a sudden thing on the part of Demas, or any of his modern followers. At first the yielding is almost imperceptible; but gradually a new point of view is arrived at, and worldly standards are adopted, until, what began as mere toleration becomes positive passion.

The consequences of such a desertion of Christ can never be fully stated. It stultifies all previous testimony, and deters others who see it from faith in Him. It outrages conscience and self-respect so certainly that the backslider is never really happy. Its end is self-chosen exclusion from all that saving fellowship with the Son of God means.

The vital question for us in all this is—How are we acting in the same circumstances as those which proved too much for Demas in Rome? How far are we influencing, or being influenced by the world? How far are we "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"? How far are we standing alone with Him against all that conflicts with His Will? Yet always remember that a return to Christ is blessedly possible, even to Demas, in the hour of his self-discovery. If, with shame of face, he ventures to His feet, Christ cannot but forgive, restore, and renew him.

God, that cannot lie.

THE only limits to the power of God are moral ones. His nature fixes the horizon of our conceptions and sets a boundary to our faith. His eternal unchangeableness is the warrant for every exercise of trust in His promises. In His Word we have ultimate truth about all that concerns our present and eternal well-being.

God cannot lie about *the past*. When He declares full and free forgiveness through Jesus Christ to all who, having sinned, accept the offers of His Gospel, He cannot turn away the neediest suppliant. His character is involved in the fulfilment of His promise. Since He cannot lie, sin confessed is buried in the crimson sea of His forgetfulness.

God cannot lie about *the present*. However harassed and disturbed we may be at times, on account of strange and inexplicable experiences, we may rest assured that "all things work together for good" to them that love Him. The tempter may frown or fascinate, the world may praise or persecute; but nothing can interfere with His sovereign purpose. Nature may again and again proclaim its weakness; but on His own sure warrant grace sufficient is ever available to help in time of need.

God cannot lie about *the future*. His declarations both of reward and judgment are irrevocable. There is a crown of life laid up for the faithful soldier, and a crown of rejoicing also for them that love His Appearing. Therefore His people may well rejoice in the immutable Word. But, by the same token, there is certain punishment and destruction for the finally impenitent, of which there is no possible evasion. The nature of God assures alike the joy of His redeemed and the judgment of His rejectors.

TITUS ii. 10.

Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

THE lot of Christian slaves in Crete seems to offer little opportunity for the realization of such an ideal of life as this. Yet consecration and communion are to ensure the conquest of circumstance. They who have been themselves adorned with the beauties of Christ's salvation are in turn to adorn His Gospel with the consistencies of loving and loyal lives—for such ones are in every age the greatest evidence of the reality of the Lord. By their fruits men know Him.

How wide and comprehensive is the scope of grace; for it is "in all things" that this purpose is to be preserved. In circumstances of poverty, hardship, loneliness, and unfeeling authority, such as characterized the lot of these slaves, those who are His people are to manifest the beauty of holiness. The unlikeliest ore will yield the most precious gold when the fire of sincere obedience is applied. There is a sufficient and sure ministry of grace which always co-operates with the resolute energies of those who seek in all their ways to honour Him.

It is "God our Saviour" who is thus to be glorified; and pre-eminently the doctrine of His saving power which is to be adorned by those who are experiencing its fulness. Once they were sunken in the marshes of sin, and lost in the mazes of self-will. That they are now recovered to holy purpose and recreated in new energy, is before all things tribute to Him Who has saved them. In nothing so much as by showing forth His grace do sinful men establish His glory.

Ready to every good work.

THE history of failure in any sphere is usually the history of unreadiness, and never more conspicuously so than in respect of individual Christian service. Our calls to serve are apt to come upon us so swiftly and unexpectedly as to leave no time for preparation of the soul. The voice of each of them is as a veritable summons to the Judgment-seat; so surely is character revealed by our readiness or unreadiness of response.

The servant of Christ must live in fellowship with Him Who not only enjoins, but exemplifies in Himself, this instant readiness which qualifies for victorious conflict and effective service. Never was He for a moment found "off guard." Never was He preoccupied or absorbed. Never did an appeal find Him unprepared. His unseen life of fellowship with the Father, strengthened by frequent withdrawal from the scenes of activity to the solitudes of communion, was such that He was never out of touch. The occasion always found Him ready with the healing grace, the saving word, and the inspiring sympathy which men needed. His entire life was keyed to this dominant note of readiness to serve. To live in fellowship with Him is to partake of this same spirit.

There is nothing narrow about the Kingdom of God, except its entrance. How broad, for instance, are its sympathies and interests. Its out-reach is as wide as the love of God. "Every good work" is comprehended in its programme. Hence, we are not to define for ourselves what we will or will not do, but we are to hold ourselves in readiness to respond with a glad "Here am I, Lord," whenever He may call, and whatever He may indicate as His present Will.

PHILEMON iv. 18.

Put that on mine account.

PAUL'S desire that his life should be a faithful reproduction of the life of the Lord is nowhere so beautifully illustrated as in his relationship with Philemon and with Onesimus his runaway slave. He becomes a mediator between the outraged master and the offending servant; and it is on the ground of his mediation that the one who justly deserves punishment is emboldened to return to his former allegiance. Moreover, he becomes surety for him, and in these words takes upon himself the responsibility both of his past wrongdoing and his future obedience. "Put that on mine account," is his guarantee to Philemon that in all moral respects he shall not be at loss in receiving again the one who merits nothing but reprisal.

Paul had learned this aspect of love's ministry in the school of Christ, and is endeavouring to deal with Onesimus as Christ had dealt with him. His own sins had all been laid to the account of the Lamb Who died, and in virtue of His name he found himself a free man. This deep-rooted consciousness is the reservoir of all his moral and spiritual energy. And as with him, so with us. All sin, of the past, the present, and the future, is comprehended in the scope of His Atonement. Every indebtedness of ours has been put upon the account of Christ in the records of Eternity. For His sake we are forgiven, received back into fellowship, and trusted again by our Heavenly Father with the interests of His Kingdom. What love does this express! And what responsive love should it evoke!

Thou remainest.

THE knowledge that amid all change and chaos God remains unchangeably the same is the foundation of all Christian life and experience. It is like the alphabet and grammar of a language which makes possession of the treasures of its literature possible. It is, moreover, the secret and storehouse of power. We see in all modern invention the attempt to discover, conserve, and apply the hidden forces of Nature for the doing of the will of men. Similarly in the realm of faith, this knowledge of God's abiding faithfulness is the impulse and enduement of every activity, furnishing all that is needed by His people for the carrying out of His commands.

To "look on the bright side of things" in a world which seems to be compact of change and chance, one must needs stand on the bright side. To look beyond the withering grass to the abiding Lord is to furnish the heart with both the note and the spirit of the "new song."

The life of faithful obedience is not infrequently the life of loneliness. Friends misunderstand, draw apart from us, and sometimes even become positively hostile, as we unswervingly pursue the pathway of discipleship. As with the Lord Himself, His servants are sometimes forsaken by all men; and in that hour, with Him they may say: "The Father hath not left me alone." The unfailing support of the believer upon whom the burden of loneliness presses is "Thou remainest." With this assurance he may challenge the darkness and laugh at his own fears. For the Divine companionship and commendation are strength indeed.

HEBREWS ii. 18.

Able to succour them that are tempted.

THIS is one of the great declarations concerning Christ which clearly proclaim His universality. For temptation is the common experience of men. Each according to his temperament, history, and environment, is tempted to depart from his allegiances; and the greatest conscious need of every man is that of help to avoid, to resist, and to overcome. In nothing does Christ more fully enter into the fellowship of human lives than in His perfect understanding of all this,—and in His power of succour.

His own temptation warrants the belief that temptation does not imply inevitable sin. There is a border line between suggestion and transgression which we cross only according to our own will. The fact of His temptation reveals also that some such experience is essential to the development of character. This, indeed, is the explanation of the Divine ordering both of circumstances, with their chronic temptation, and of crises, with their acute temptation. Part of the record of the saints in every age is that "they were tempted."

All experience of conquest comes along the line of co-operation. The efforts of the believer are reinforced by the might of the Saviour. We, on our part, are to watch and pray lest we "enter into" the seductive suggestions of the adversary. He, on His part, covenants to communicate to mind, desire, will, hands, feet, and memory, His own triumphant life. It is thus that the succoured believer is made "more than conqueror."

Hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

THE thing most to be feared in regard to sin is not lest we should become disappointed at the unsatisfactory nature of its promises, nor discouraged and overtaken by its consequences, nor even that we should be defiled by its stain. The greatest peril is lest we should become hardened under its influence. For every sin dulls some spiritual sense, making the ear heavy, the emotions callous, and the conscience sluggish. This hardening process may, and, in fact, does go on quite unnoticed and unchecked. A man who begins by being indifferent to sin gradually becomes insensible of it; and finally is found impenitent and implacable. Do we not remember in ourselves how once the discovery of moral fault caused tears, the suggestion of wrong caused a shudder, and the voice of God kindled our every emotion? And do we not know how, by accommodating ourselves to sin's suggestions, we imperceptibly lost this sensitiveness; until we came to regard sin as a matter of course? It is against such hardening that we are here warned. For it is the precursor of death.

It is the deceitfulness of sin which makes this destructive process possible and common. Its appeal is deceitful, for it lures a man on only to weary and disappoint him. Its appearance, too, is deceitful, for it often seems to be a mere trifle, whereas in reality it is a disguised tyrant. Its offer is deceitful, for while it promises a larger freedom than God and conscience seem to allow, men find that they have declined a Master only to find a taskmaster. How glad is the Evangel which declares that "He shall save their souls from deceit"!

We which have believed do enter into rest.

THE rest into which Christ calls men by His Gospel is no mere mental ecstasy or expectation, but a living experience of the peace and protection which He ministers to the lives over which He has undivided control. It is the end of all uncertainty and anxiety concerning past, present, and future; for its foundation is the strong and certain Word of the Lord. It is, in short, the communication of Christ's own life to His friends.

To enter into rest does not mean the cessation of all energy. It is not, for instance, rest from temptation, nor from the necessity of prayerful and watchful conflict. Nor is it rest from the obligations of Christian service. But it is rest *in* these things—the rest of knowing the all-sufficient grace of a conquering Saviour to beat down every foe and to accomplish His own purposes in and through His people. It is, in short, "the rest of ceasing from myself, to find my all in Thee." As a child rests in the wisdom and reason of the parent, content to do his behest as he increasingly apprehends it, so does the believer rest in the Will and Word of the Lord. This is the rest of a life planned, provided, and protected. It is the very opposite of mere nerveless slackness; for it qualifies and recreates men for toil as nothing else does.

This life of rest is entered upon by a definite act of faith. The promises of God are as stepping-stones over the turbulent waters of unrest into the green pastures of peace. As a believer ventures upon them with self-surrendering trust, he is brought into the good land where "His rest is glorious."

Thou art My Son . . . Thou art a Priest.

THUS is divinely declared the nature of Christ's relationship to the Father and of His mission among men. His confidence in all the conflicting experiences of His earthly days is the fact of His Sonship. Since He is the Son of God, He cannot fail of the strengthening support of the Father's presence. Since He is also a Priest, the crown of His service must inevitably be sacrifice. These are the twin foundations of the earthly life of the Lord. Nor can these ever be dissevered. It is as the spotless Son of God that He is vested with the priestly garments of sacrifice. It is as the Great High Priest that He exhibits the love of the Father in its contact with human sin.

As with Christ so with His people. Sonship and service are indissolubly linked. The outcome of adjusted relationship with God is priestly service in the temple of human need. To this priesthood all believers are commissioned by the mighty ordination of the Piercéd Hand. In general terms their priestly service consists, as did the work of the temple-priests under the Old Covenant, in representing men in all their need before God, and in representing God in all His fulness before men. Into His immediate presence they enter by the Blood, bearing upon their hearts the sins and sorrows of an estranged people. From the Holy Place they come forth with God's message upon their lips, the perfume of the Sanctuary clinging to their persons and the radiance of His beauty reflected in their countenance, to bless their fellows. To live up to this twofold designation in the power of the Anointing Spirit, is the high calling of us all.

HEBREWS vi. 3.

This will we do.

IN no sense is the exhortation on which this resolve is based directed toward the forsaking of fundamental Christian doctrine. The people of God are to leave the elementary principles of the faith as they go on toward the perfection of holiness, only in the same sense as that in which an architect leaves the foundation as his building approaches its completion. There is an implication of earnest endeavour after the fullest possible acquisition of Christ-like character in every profession of trust in the great foundation of His perfected work. The one who knows the efficacy of the grace that saves, must go on by consecration, prayer, and sincere endeavour, to know the grace that sanctifies. Faith in Christ is not a goal but a starting-point.

There is nothing inevitable in regard to Christian growth and development, except the certainty of failure where the whole man is not girded to the task of pressing on "toward the mark." Christians do not become holy in life and character by mere passive desire. No man "by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature." Therefore, if we would approximate to the likeness of our Great Example—and who indeed of His people has any lesser ideal?—this must be the sincere language of our hearts: "This will we do." It involves, of course, the forsaking of things that are behind and the forswearing of things that are around. But with the assurance that every honest effort is reinforced by the power of God, we shall not be disappointed of our hope. Nor He of His purpose.

Able also to save them to the uttermost.

THIS is the greatest claim which is made on Christ's behalf. Before His death it was announced that "He shall *save* His people from their sins." During His life He declared that He had come "to *save* that which was lost." At His death even His foes cried: "He *saved* others." Now in the power of His risen and exalted life the experience of His people is voiced in the grand declaration that "He is able to *save* to the uttermost."

Wilful transgression calls for pardon; moral stain for cleansing; bondage for liberation; and disease for healing. In all these aspects of sin Christ exerts His power. From the utmost depth of need He delivers and leads men to the utmost height of holiness. By the establishment of a new principle of righteousness, by the creation of moral correspondence with God, by the inspiration of new motive and the enthronement of quickened conscience, by the conversion of antagonisms into loyalties, and by the impartation of adequate power, He fulfils this word. Such a mighty work is to be accomplished not by external restraint but by internal refinement. The expulsive power of new affection, the expansive power of new control, and the ennobling power of new ideal, are the methods by which the mighty change is wrought in any life.

To the uttermost bound of time also does His saving work extend. The ceaseless growth and accumulation of temptation, and the consequent increase of conflict in every redeemed life, only emphasize the need of this Evangel. It must not be forgotten, however, that though limitless in its scope, Christ's salvation is strictly limited in its operation to "them that come unto God by Him." His only inability is that which is conditioned by stubborn resistance.

HEBREWS viii. 5.

All things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

THE command given to Moses regarding the complex details of the Tabernacle and its services was urgent because of their typical significance. For each of them prefigured Christ in some aspect of His life and work. Hence the larger significance of this injunction to the lives of His people, whose service it is to represent Him before the world.

Our first need is to behold Him daily. For in His life alone, as in the Mount of God, do we find the plan for our own. He affords a perfect example and standard of conduct for every circumstance and contingency; and His sufficiency ensures our efficiency in all obedient co-operation. To know His plan for life liberates from all tyranny of convention and bigotry of self-content. Our ideals are at once our emancipators and our critics. And though no man sees the whole pattern at once, we discern enough at any one time both to correct and to inspire us. And all else depends upon obedience. As the scientist knows just as much of Nature as his experiments justify, so we know just as much of God's Will as our conduct justifies. Disobedience in respect of any detail means darkness with regard to the rest of the pattern.

What is the Pattern we see "in the Mount"? And how far do our lives correspond? As we behold the Lord Christ, we see life's governing principles—gain by loss, riches by sacrifice, influence by obedience, enlargement by restriction, life by death. These are the things which are true in Him, and which must become true also in us by our own obedient working. Then, as Moses came from the mount to be a minister of blessing to the people, so shall we descend to the valley of duty to be as lights in the world's darkness.

He appeared to put away sin.

THIS is the shortest and fullest declaration of the Divine programme in the world. God and sin are at deadly antagonism; and every energy of His grace is directed upon the liberation of men from its deadly thraldom unto glorious liberty.

Christ is only apprehended by any man in regard to his individual sin. In this respect self-consciousness is the beginning of saving knowledge; for only when sin's defilement and bondage is realized does the soul turn to Christ for cleansing and liberation. How complete is the salvation which is His response to faith's cry. He does not merely proclaim a legal pardon but effects an actual exclusion of the evil. His presence and that of tolerated sinful desire are mutually incompatible; and hence, in order to effect His purpose of salvation He must literally "put away sin." This He does, not by any artificial means of exhaustion, but by the simpler and completer method of displacement. The incoming power of His life alone secures freedom alike from the taint of heredity and the power of environment, which, in the last analysis, are the causes of our personal sinning.

Christ never works arbitrarily. If He puts away sin in any life, it is only because the man is gladly willing that He should do so. The completeness of His sacrifice and the power of His finished work on behalf of the entire world, is all possible of frustration by any stubborn resistance upon our part. Indeed, the great tragedy of life is the defeat of His love upon the moral battle-fields where individual souls contend with the purposes of Divine grace. For the truth regarding every life is that Christ has either "put away sin," or sin has put away Christ.

HEBREWS x. 36.

Ye have need of patience.

MOST of us realize our need of patience in respect of human relationships. For between man and man patience is that antidote of social friction which makes life in a common bond possible to those of differing and conflicting temperaments. And this grace is unfailingly ministered to those who seek it at the hand of the God of all Grace. It is, however, not in respect of men, but in regard to God that this word is of fullest significance. Undoubtedly a great need of every Christian life is to exercise patience toward Him Whose ways are often slow to our restless minds, Whose methods seem devious to us, and Who frequently keeps us waiting for the realization of His promises in order to discipline our spirits and make us capable of worthily receiving His gifts.

It is in regard to prayer that this need of patience is most obvious. We are prone to conclude that Divine delays are denials; that prayers unanswered according to our conceptions have miscarried; and that God has somehow forgotten to be gracious—while all the time He is training faith to greater endurance and fuller energy by keeping us waiting. The fact is, we are all by nature impatient of restraint and delay, and would reduce God to the measure of our own poor minds. It is, however, just because His promises are greater than our apprehensions, and His grace than all our needs, that He is unhurried in His dealings with us. How foolish it is then to hasten from His presence, like petulant children, when by His silence He bids us wait. An impatient believer may run before the Lord to his own utter undoing and to the ruin of His work.

Strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

THE inspiring roll of faith's heroes and heroines sets before us lives which were other-worldly. Founded upon the realities of the unseen and eternal things revealed to them by the manifold ministry of God, each had learned to make the great refusal. The world was as attractive and seductive to them in their day as to us in ours. But who gives thought to the tinsel when the real gold is within his grasp? Faith's vision for ever dims the lustre of the world's meretricious brightness. Its choice is made deliberately. Its loss may be heavy; but its gains are immediate.

The Christian's attitude to the world is not to be that of indifference. In just such degree, however, as He is living in union with Christ, the world knows him not, "because it knew Him not." Its aims and his ideals are so dissimilar as to afford no point of contact on the plane of common effort. His citizenship is in Heaven, and the devotion of his life is directed thitherward. Things of eternal import crowd out from his affections things which are merely to perish with the using. The world is not his Fatherland; and he resolutely refuses naturalization.

At the same time, they to whom the world is but a pilgrim pathway, are not unmindful of the good of the country in which they sojourn. Realizing that they are to pass this way but once, their joy is to minister the blessing of God as they go through life. Hence their testimony and witness. In every age they have been the light of the world, and have left in their track unspeakable blessing.

HEBREWS xii. 24.

The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

THE foundation of all the blessedness of which Christians have become possessors is the Blood of Christ and the assurance it speaks to the soul. Comparison between His life laid down and that of any other life which pays forfeit either to human passion or natural process, is utterly impossible. For He is as far removed from all other men as is the sun from the earth. And yet it is by this comparison, Divinely advanced, that the glory of the Blood of Christ is brought home to us and secured.

The blood of Abel speaks of the unsuspected evil that lurks in the human heart; and how, from the small beginnings of envy and self-will, murder and death eventuate. It tells also of the impossibility of escape from sin's penalty. A man's sin has not only to do with his fellow-men, but with God; so that sooner or later the righteousness of God is bound to overtake the unrighteous sinner. It declares further that sin excludes men from God's presence. But above all it speaks of the indelible mark which sin leaves. The stain left upon Cain could never be erased by his own hand or that of another. Similarly every slain righteousness, every outraged innocency, and every murdered possibility, is recorded in the character of the guilty.

Christ's Blood speaks infinitely better things than all these. For it declares that even Cain is God's care; that the penalty of sin has been fully borne; that communion with God is re-established; and that the darkest moral stain may be washed out for ever—and all as the beginning of a transforming process of Divine grace, by which men become, not only in name but in character, the sons of God.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

THE changelessness of Christ is the gladdest note of His evangel. That He remains always and ever the same is at once the strong proof of His divinity and His winsome commendation to needy men. The changefulness of life, and the insecurity of its best things, are the cause of all our depression and restlessness. To know that He is the solitary exception to the "change and decay in all around I see," invests the life of faith with calm certainty and cloudless gladness.

Our "yesterdays" are for the most part consecrated by memory, and our "to-morrows" illumined by hope. But our "to-days" are apt to be so full of monotonous prose as to make the present need of Christ unspeakably great, and the difficulty in realizing Him equally so. It is always much easier for faith to say "Hitherto" and "Henceforth," than to say "Now!" The sun never seems quite so far away from the earth as when it is just overhead. So, indeed, is it with regard to the soul's realization of Christ. The great value of this message is its confident present note.

Christ is the same to-day, as ever, in His attitude toward unrighteousness. The folly which binds men to earth, the materialism which blinds them to true values, and the selfishness which enslaves them in meaner service than that of the sons of God, are all condemned by His holiness. He is unchanged in His ethical standards both for the conduct of individuals and nations. Best of all, He is unchanged in His attitude toward the weak and sinful. His compassion for frailty, His comfort and assurance for the repentant sinner, and His inspiration for the self-deprecating disciple, are as real to-day as when He lived among men. This is the entire confidence of His friends.

Doers of the Word, and not hearers only.

THERE is certain condemnation consequent upon knowledge which is not translated into conduct and character. The Word of God is living and powerful; but it only works effectually in them that believe, i.e. in them whose faith expresses itself in practical obedience to the Divine precepts. It is solemnly possible for wilfulness to make the Word of none effect.

There is no greater danger than the misconception which many entertain regarding the Word of God; as though love of hearing its proclamation, or strength of mental acknowledgment of its principles and precepts, has something of the nature of virtue. Yet God has given His Word as a light for men to walk by and not merely to admire. Anything less than implicit obedience is both a dishonour to Him and a certain deterioration of the moral nature.

The promises of the Word are all conditional; and only as their conditions are fulfilled do men become "doers," and cease to be "hearers only." Its commands call for the co-operation of every redeemed energy; and nothing less is sufficient for the realization of its purposes. The Christian life is never a matter of mere mental elation or theoretic belief. Those who would be followers of Christ, and partakers of His glory, must themselves be "doers," even as He was a doer of the Father's Will. To fall short in this respect is to fail entirely of His abounding grace. What proportion does "*doing*" bear to "*hearing*" in our lives?

The law of liberty.

THIS unique definition of the Christian ethic compels a pause by its apparent contradiction. Law is commonly regarded as the restraint of liberty, and liberty as the removal of law. Here, however, we have the union of mutual contradictions in a positive direction to Christian living. And it is justified by the perfect Example of Him Who incarnated all that which He enjoins upon His people. For in His life we find the conjunction of law and liberty in a harmony which is the very music of the Gospel. He lived in entire obedience to the law of God; and hence His freedom from every other bondage.

In the truest sense, the Gospel affords a way of escape—but not from obligation. Its fellowship is a democracy, but never an anarchy. It proclaims a deliverance, but unto a discipline. Christ deals centrally with men—first capturing their hearts by His own love, and then leaving them free within limits which are as wide as His love. Thus the law of liberty is the law of love. He makes men good, not by outer restraint but by inner constraint; not by inspired fear but by infused fervour; not by imposing new precepts but by inspiring a new passion. It is the glory and transcendence of the Gospel that it creates an instinct of obedience in forgiven souls. We find completest enfranchisement in completest enslavement. His people are made free to do His Will; and under its sway become too free to want to do any other. His statutes actually become their songs in the house of their pilgrimage. They set the Law to music, and march to its strains as men redeemed.

JAMES iii. 13.

Meekness of wisdom.

THE conjunction of meekness and wisdom is a strange one; for wisdom is prone to arrogance. It is apt to assume superiority over unenlightenment, and, on this account, to overawe and depress where it should illumine and inspire. But where it partakes of this quality it is obviously itself imperfect. True wisdom recognizes its own partial vision. It knows full well the great extent of the field in which it ranges. Hence it is humble and meek in its attitude toward all men.

If this is true in the abstract, how much more so concerning that wisdom unto salvation which is the influence of the Spirit of God in the lives of His people! They are always confident concerning Him Whom they have believed. Yet they are, at the same time, also conscious that they know Him but in part. They can have no illusions about themselves. Their present wisdom only serves to make vivid the utter folly of the days when Christ was unrecognized and uncrowned. And they know that they have nothing of illumination and apprehension that they have not received.

It is the majesty of the Lord which is reflected in the meekness of His servant; for it is in Him that "meekness of wisdom" is first and most fully seen. He Who came to earth not only to declare, but actually Himself to be the wisdom of God, lived among men of ignorant pride and obstinate passion as the Man of meekness. It is indeed His eternal attraction to world-weary souls that He is "meek and lowly in heart," and that coming to Him they learn Heaven's wisdom about earth's ways.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.

HERE is the secret of much unanswered prayer. Like letters wrongly addressed, which find their way into the Dead Letter Office, so do many prayers fail of their destination, and, hence, of their purpose. They are wrongly addressed, being directed toward self-gratification instead of toward the glory of God. Their matter may be right while their motive is entirely wrong. The gifts they seek may be such as God has promised. The fact, however, that they are chiefly desired in order to attain personal pleasure, ease, or advantage, makes it impossible for God to grant the request consistently with His love for the one who prays.

Indeed, nothing could be worse for the character of any child than to get everything he asks for, without any regard on the part of the parent to the moral effect of his compliance. The first concern of God's wisdom and love is not to gratify our uncontrolled wishes so much as to sanctify our hearts and lives. Hence many a lesson comes by way of unanswered prayer which could never be learned were our requests granted.

How subtle, and how little understood, is the power of hidden motive to commend or contradict our requests before God. Insincerity, where it lurks, is most often entirely unsuspected; and even when recognized there is nothing we are so unready to admit. Yet if we honestly examine our hearts ere we come into the Sanctuary, searching them by such light of God's Will as we possess, how unerring is the verdict of conscience, and how certain the confirmation of His Word! This is the only pathway to prayer in which Divine answers are the normal experience.

JAMES v. 7.

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.

AMID all the injustice and oppression under which the scattered believers were often compelled to live without any hope of earthly redress, this was their upholding inspiration. Things will not always go on as they have done. The darkest hour is before the dawn. The Lord may seem to delay His Return; but there is nothing more certain than that He intends to come. However hard their lot in life may be, it cannot shut them out from this glorious prospect.

In every age this message is needed, and in none more so than the present. The passions of men fill the world with dark anxieties and gloomy forebodings. Human civilization has been "tried and found wanting"; and amid the clash and roar of unrest earnest souls are wistfully asking where peace is to be found, and how godlessness is to be conquered. There is but one answer. Not in any reconstruction of national or social life; not by the united efforts of men to create a brotherhood without the foundation of Fatherhood and Saviourhood; not by the slow triumph of righteousness over the powers of darkness —but alone by the Coming of the Lord. The triumph of the Kingdom will never be secured while the King is absent. The ills and evils of the world will never be dealt with until He comes. But His word is sure; and we may well wait His time with loins girt about and lamps shining. We may eat our Passover; but we must eat it in haste. For it may be at the midnight hour the cry shall go forth!

The Father Who . . . judgeth.

THE declared objective of all revelation and of all discipline is that men should be brought to know God. By the Living Word, and in the written Word also, He is variously set forth to this end. In the light of this purpose what a wealth of meaning there is in the conjunction of God as Father and Judge. It proclaims Him as being near enough to satisfy the heart's longing for fellowship; and, at the same time, declares Him as sufficiently far removed to invest life with wholesome fear. His Fatherly love is not inconsistent with His inviolate righteousness. His tenderness is no contradiction of His justice. He is the God of reality; and for the sake of those He loves He will not allow anything but reality in them to pass muster.

Nor is His judgment deferred until the end of life. Each day is a judgment-day to the one who lives in His fellowship. And each day the sentence is written, not merely in an invisible record which one day is to be unrolled, but also in the visible character of each one of us. For every man is writing, not in word but in deed, his own autobiography, under the scrutiny of the Father-Judge.

The unspeakable cost at which our redemption has been procured both emphasizes the necessity of a holy life and interprets the ideal set before us. It is the first and final argument for the highest possible conception of the duties of sonship. The love which it expresses certainly casts out fear of punishment; but only to inspire the greater and more powerful fear of falling short of the Divine expectation, and of grieving the Father-heart of God.

That ye should follow His steps.

THE sovereign law of life for each of Christ's disciples, whatever be the actual circumstances in which they are placed, is to follow Him. Not that He has left us any code of prohibitions and precepts which are appropriate to the conditions of life to-day. Rather has He both enunciated and exemplified certain unchangeable principles of conduct, leaving their sincere application to the honest heart of each follower.

But let it never be thought that this is a simple and easy matter. In taking the path of life which He did, "Christ also suffered." Such a life as His invited the hostility of the world by its silent condemnation of much that in every age characterizes the world's life. It could not fail to draw upon Him the undisguised hatred of those who were silently put in the wrong by His example. And as with the Master so with the servant—though in lesser degree. The life to which we are committed is essentially opposed to that of the world. Its ideals are not only contradictory but are actively in conflict with the worldly conception of good. Each one who "will live godly in Christ Jesus" must prepare to suffer persecution. No man ever yet entered the Kingdom of God except through much tribulation.

But, just as His suffering was vicarious, leading to the salvation of the very world which crucified Him, so, too, though in widely differing sense, is that of His people. The outcome of their toil and tears and pain is a positive factor in the blessing of the world for which He died. The things which happen to them in the pathway of faithful witness "fall out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel." In the most profound sense of all "without shedding of blood is no remission of sin."

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

VERY early on in the life of the infant Church the fact was impressed upon its members that it is not enough to recognize Christ as Saviour and to take from His pierced hand the gift of eternal life. To stop here is to misread entirely, and to apprehend incompletely, the purpose of His death. He must also be acknowledged as Sovereign ; and to Him must be given that for which He gave Himself—the entire possession of the redeemed life. Such acknowledgment is as definite a matter as is the coronation of any earthly king and his establishment on the throne of the country of which he is the rightful ruler. It may take but one moment of time to effect the actual enthronement in the one case as in the other. Yet the entire life of the willing subject will only be time enough to fulfil all the covenanted obedience which is latent in the initial act.

Do not, therefore, postpone His coronation until the day of His Coming again ; or it is likely you will find yourself without share in that future glory. If He is not now Lord of all He is not Lord at all. Nor will any opportunity which that great day may afford atone for the forfeiture in which present failure to enthrone Him involves His people. Many give Him a place in their hearts ; some even give him prominence there ; but nothing less than *pre-eminence* is enough. If He is to be satisfied, and if we are to be really His, in deed as in designation, and so to know the fulness of His saving power which is essential for the discharge of all our Christian obligations, we must make Him King. And, as men do make Him King, He makes them conquerors.

Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

THE mind of Christ is the armour of His people. His mind, as He Himself discloses it, was ever directed toward the supremacy of the Will of God. In this spirit He came to earth: "I came not to do Mine own will, but the Will of Him that sent Me." In this spirit He actively engaged in the ministries of His life: "I seek not Mine own will." In this spirit He looked upon His work among men: "My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent Me." In this spirit He reconstructed for Himself the common relationships of life: "Whosoever shall do the Will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." In this spirit He repelled the last temptation of the soul: "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done."

This is the "mind" which likewise arms His people. They are surrounded by foes—some of which are the children of their own riotous past, and others the persistent influences of their now-forsaken allegiances; and the ultimate issue of every struggle is governed by their mental and moral attitude. Hence, to "arm yourselves with the same mind," is the open secret of victory given to each one as the struggle is joined. In other words,—acknowledge by practical surrender and obedience the supremacy of God's Will! Move toward its fulfilment as the one thing in the world that is altogether desirable! Steer your course by no other than this Pole-star!

Though such a life cannot be without suffering it shall be without defeat and dishonour. And its glory also shall do at least something to hide the shame of "the time past," when, with hot heart, we "wrought the will of the Gentiles."

When the Chief Shepherd shall appear.

THE coming of "the Chief Shepherd" is part of the inspiration of all His under-shepherds to whom is entrusted the privileged service of tending His flock. Peter has never forgotten the thrill with which he heard those words from the lips of the Lord on the morning of his restoration to fellowship after his grievous fall. The commission to "feed My sheep" came then to his bruised heart as the expression of Christ's renewed trust in him; and the wonder of Christ's grace is still upon him as he re-echoes Christ's words.

This counsel, vibrant with the passion of a devoted heart, comes to every one who, like the apostle himself, has looked into the face of Christ and said: "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Love to Christ is entirely expressible in terms of love and service to others, for which opportunity abounds. All around us there are lives needing just such help as a shepherd gives to a flock of sheep. Some need protection from peril; others the strengthening Word of Life; others example and direction as to the homeward path. We have not to look far in order to discern from whence the clamant cry of need in the world comes. And love is ever quick both to see and to do.

But before we can rejoice with the Great Shepherd over lost sheep safely found, we have to go out with Him into the night and search for them. The "crown of glory that fadeth not away" will be just those souls, so sought and won, who in the day of His Appearing shall shine in the light of His salvation.

He that lacketh these things.

THERE is a danger of spiritual myopia from which no man is entirely immune—the danger of losing the power of distant vision. It both follows a lack of the diligence already enjoined, and explains it; for the one who fails to realize his destiny and high calling will be content with his present attainment, and will cease to prepare himself for the Country that is far off. At the same time, he will unconsciously lose even the very power to see; and, gradually it may be, but surely, will come to lose also his every worthy ideal.

Such a deterioration is due mainly to the fact that he has "forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." To let slip from the grip of memory the consciousness of that washing is to make certain this declension of quality and destruction of vision. To forget the Cross and the Fountain seems, at first suggestion, almost an impossibility. But who does not know the power of other things—unworthy absorptions and engagements—to crowd out all that is holy and true from the memory and the life? The permanence of any impression depends upon its original strength. Such as take their interest in the Great Sacrifice lightly, whose coming to the Crucified was an easy and tearless thing, will soon lose its sanctifying memory. When that is effaced, blindness sets in. But the Holy Ghost Himself will guard the first impression of saving grace in the soul that is truly yielded to Him. He makes memory the ally of faith, and the past the assurance of the future.

Escaped . . . through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE only way of escape from the pollutions of the world is by the knowledge of Christ. Apart from Him the world makes an appeal to the tastes and inclinations of the natural man which is irresistible. But it is no mere head-knowledge of Him which secures men from its seductive and vicious ensnarements. Such knowledge, both exact as to quality and ample as to extent, may, and often does, co-exist with utter worldliness and frivolity of spirit. It is only that heart-knowledge proceeding from the sincere admission of His claims and the practical establishment of His government which protects anyone from the enslaving influences of the world which are constantly playing about a believer's life. Attachment to Him is the only antidote to its deadly poisonous vapours.

Hence the significance of the warning as to the danger of relapse. If a believer carelessly weakens his alliance with Christ love of the world will surely overtake him. The traitor will be inside the city ere he knows it, and will soon open the gate to the enemy; In all such cases "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." This is not to say that they cannot be again recovered, if, on making the humiliating discovery of the world's dominance, they turn again to the Saviour. For His Gospel to saint and sinner alike is: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." But such lapsed ones, even though forgiven, for ever suffer a loss of influence. They bear about with them the debilitating shame of the backslider. Blessed be God for the possibility of avoiding such a disaster.

Where is the promise of His Coming?

THE promise of Christ's Appearing has always been met by mockery on the part of those who are both unbelieving and undesirous of His Return. The world is frankly incredulous concerning His Coming Again. All its life is openly programmed as though no possible interruption could ever intervene. Its political systems, its social conventions, and its increased civilizations, take no account whatever of the greatest, and possibly the most imminent, of all future events. To the world Christ is a mere historical figure. Of the One Who is to come as King and Judge it neither knows nor believes anything.

In the Church, too, we find abundant evidence that the spirit of the world has penetrated. Even those who tacitly accept the promise of His Return as an article of the Christian faith too often practically ignore its significance and potency. Even devout and earnest believers are sometimes overcome by the general deadly drowsiness. To awaken and warn the careless, and to hearten the despondent and discouraged, the apostle Peter, in bringing his epistle to a close, reminds them that there is a vast difference between the Divine and the human methods of counting time: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." If this be taken literally, as indeed it is by some, then our Lord has not yet been gone for two days! How then can we imagine that He is "slack concerning His promise"? In any event all His dealings with men, as recorded in the Word, declare that His interventions are always opportune and well-timed. Christ came "in the fulness of time,"— when the world had been prepared for the issues of His appearance. "In the fulness of time" He will return.

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light.

THE pathway of the Christian life is none other than the pathway of Christ Himself. Brought out of the darkness of sin into the marvellous light of assured forgiveness and faithfulness, every believer is committed to an obedient following of the Lord. In this alone can he experience the fulness of His redemption; for every deviation from His law is a turning back again into darkness, and hence involves a forfeiture of the sanctifying influences of His fellowship. If we are His we must walk in the same direction as He does. We must express our agreement with Him by an ever-increasing approximation to His likeness. Light can have no fellowship with darkness. The safeguarding of his heavenward partnership, by careful fulfilment of all its responsibilities, is the supreme duty of the disciple.

It is significant, and entirely true to experience, that walking in the light should be so vitally connected with the cleansing of the Blood. No man realizes his deepening need of heart-cleansing as does the one who walks in the increasing light of Christ's companionship. It is in that brightness that hitherto unsuspected stains are revealed, and faults hitherto hidden stand out with humbling clearness. The light creates self-consciousness, which in turn begets contrite confession and believing appropriation of the power of redemption. Then does the quickened heart realize that the precious Blood is as powerful to cleanse as is the pure light of Truth to reveal. This is the assuring inspiration of all His loyal followers.

Not for ours only.

IT would almost seem as though in every age Christian believers need to be convinced of the wideness of God's mercy and convicted of their own self-centred devotion. For there is nothing narrow or restricted in the outlook and purpose of God. Upon nothing less than the whole world, with all its sin and sorrow, does the eye of His pity rest ; and for nothing less than the redemption of every man did He give the Son of His love. Whoever attempts to restrict the scope of the Divine grace, or to delimit the area of the Divine energy, only succeeds in excluding himself from its saving influences. The entrance to the Kingdom may be " strait," and the pathway of Life " narrow " ; but both entrance and pathway are wide enough to admit every creature on the terms of individual repentance and faith.

It is failure to realize the breadth of God's love, while holding faithfully to the requirements of His righteousness, which explains the supineness of many Christians regarding the task of making Christ known to the nations. Did we but understand that it is their right to know of His death on their behalf we should feel the burden of guilt which unfaithfulness in this respect involves. The Gospel is not only our treasure but also our sacred trust. To divert to our own exclusive use, whether as individuals, as a Church, or as a nation, the blessings which we are commissioned to declare to the entire human family, is to discredit our own professions of faith. Saving apprehension of the benefits of Christ's death is proved by passionate self-sacrifice for its world-wide proclamation. " Not for ours only," is enshrined in every effective creed.

Passed from death unto life.

NOTHING is more striking and illuminating than the contrasts by which the Gospel illustrates itself. The difference between the saved and the unsaved man is variously depicted as that between such as are lost and found, exiled and welcomed, blind and seeing, sick and whole, in darkness and enlightened. But of all these, this is by far the most startling—"from death unto life." Here is revealed the process by which alone men become the sons of God. It emphasizes the character of the sinful state, and the utter insufficiency of individual or collective self-effort to alter it. It declares the entire necessity for the exercise of miraculous and Divine power in the work of salvation. It ascribes all the glory to God alone—"the Lord and Giver of Life." It affirms the possibility of indubitable assurance upon the part of those in whom the eternal change has taken place. This is the height and depth of Heavenly love and power.

Vital certainty regarding saving relationship with God is never a mere matter of inference from truth. Still less is it a pious hope based upon future promise. There is as much difference between the life of one who is in such relationship and of one who is not as between a dead and a living man. When this difference is a matter of personal experience it goes very far to attest the faithfulness of the Word written. When long-slumbering faculties are quickened into life, when deteriorated capacities are re-created, when new intuitions and energies are called into being, and when new love and loyalty become an overpowering inspiration, no man can have any doubt as to the work of God within him. He has been born again, and cannot but declare the grace and power which has raised him from the dead.

1 John iv. 19.

We love Him, because He first loved us.

LOVE for Christ, which is the inspiration of all Christian service worthy the name, is never an original movement upon the part of any one of us. It is rather the response of the grateful heart to realized affection —an affection expressed in the terms of Bethlehem and Calvary. As the steel-filing leaps to the magnet, so does the awakened heart go forth in reciprocal love to unite itself to Him by Whose love redemption has become an accomplished fact. This is the sufficient explanation of all the endurance, discipline, and sacrifice, in which true service ever involves Christ's disciples. For love of this sort thinks nothing of cost. It has no reserve in making its offering. With quick intuition it knows that the best is not worthy of Him to Whom it is rendered, and that anything less than the whole is a dishonour.

Nothing is more important than that this impulse of love should be safeguarded and secured. Its fire must be continually fed by the fuel of fresh knowledge of the Lord. It cannot be maintained on the mere memory of a past experience. Indeed, this is the tragedy of many a Christian life—that its enthusiasm for Christ has burnt itself out. Nor is the reason far to seek; for it is only those who grow in His knowledge who increase also in His grace and love. Study of His Word, therefore, and the close fellowship of obedience also, are entirely necessary if blood-heat is to be maintained. We come to love Him supremely and sacrificially by ever-increasing knowledge of His supreme and sacrificial love for us.

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him.

THE keynote of this entire Epistle is assurance. There may be some things, which, in respect of final knowledge, the apostle is content to leave in suspense. With regard to vital things, however, there is no hint of uncertainty in his constantly reiterated: "We know." Nor does such certainty partake at all of mere presumption. Its basis is the unchanging Word of God, and its justification that measure of personal experience of His faithfulness of which all His people are common partakers. It is entirely essential to all strong and vigorous life, to all untroubled peace, and to all victorious joy. Only the one who knows beyond all doubt his saving union with God can ever stand unmoved as His witness in the world, or withstand the open and insidious assaults of the enemy.

Indubitable witness as to the present possession of the blessings of salvation is never merely subjective, however deep the feelings or stable the emotions of the believer may be. He needs, as the ground of his assurance, something objective and infinitely more permanent—and here in Christ he finds it. It is His character of changeless love—which is unaffected by any fluctuation in our response, and of eternal faithfulness—which is never dependent for its permanence upon our faith, which constitutes His disciples' witness. It is to these things also that the Eternal Spirit testifies within their hearts. It is in the strength of this assurance that they in turn cry to the world: "Behold the Lamb of God."

This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ.

WHILE it is made clear from other New Testament Scriptures that the personal anti-Christ will not rise to power until the days of the Great Tribulation, subsequently to be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's Coming to earth with His saints, the spirit of anti-Christ is already at work in the world. Indeed, in these our days, it would seem as though—by its permeation of Church and world alike—the way is being prepared for the final unveiling of personified opposition to the Son of God. Denial of the Divine sovereignty, deification of mere human nature, and the humanizing of God in religious teaching widely accepted to-day, seem to point clearly in this direction. It has become almost the normal state of things that the Word of God should be divested of its Divine inspiration and unique authority; the Day of God stripped of all sanctity, and devoted to material gain and pleasure; the Laws of God openly derided—and all under the guise of a larger conception of Him. This is the spirit of anti-Christ.

While the Gospel, which gives to Christ and to Him alone the supreme place in the work of redemption and in the kingdom of His people's lives, works effectually in preparing for His Return, so does such spurious modern teaching prepare the minds of men for the acceptance of the usurper. Familiarized with the principles of politico-religious alliance and with the ideal of a religio-material kingdom, to accept their incarnation will be no great trouble for the majority. How carefully should we who are Christ's "try the spirits," and separate ourselves from all that gives to Him any place lower than the highest!

For his name's sake they went forth.

ONE of the greatest forces for good available to Christ's followers is the example of those who have fought the good fight and finished their course ahead of them. This declaration concerning some early preachers of the Gospel lets us into the secret of their splendid endurance and dauntless courage. His Name had become precious to them; for in its power they had themselves been saved, by its merits the secret miracle of answered prayer had become their normal experience, and through its proclamation their service was made effective to the saving of other lives. Little wonder, then, that the glory of that Name became their inspiring and sustaining hope. It is for us to follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

Life's ideals entirely determine its quality. Its secret affections govern the potency as well as the direction of its open efforts. When men go forth day by day to their so-called secular toil, as well as to the more sacred ministry of the Word, "for His Name's sake," determined to make everything therein subservient to this supreme motive, they cannot fail of their purpose. Hardness, suffering, persecution, ingratitude and the like, which every faithful life experiences in greater or lesser degree, are easily borne "for His Name's sake"; while any lesser upholding would be insufficient. Difficulties cannot daunt the one who realizes that his work is so directly and intimately related to the Beloved. The Christ-filled vision and the Christ-captured heart are the all-powerful factors of holy service.

Keep yourselves in the love of God.

OPPOSED by prevailing apostasy in the midst of which they live, God's children are exhorted to guard their inspiration by building themselves up on their most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Ghost, and by looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. At first sight it seems a confusion of emphasis that the responsibility for self-keeping should, in any degree, devolve upon the believer. Taken together, however, with the assurance immediately following, that God is able to keep them from falling, it is evident that His keeping power is manifested in just that communication of necessary strength for self-keeping which comes by the illumination of understanding, the sensitizing of conscience, and the reinforcement of will, which is experienced by those whose lives are truly yielded to His control.

The love of God is the sphere of the Christian existence. The believer does not put himself there. He has been translated thither out of the kingdom of darkness. But he must keep himself where God has placed him. Within that encircling protection he is not immune from attack; but is secured against overthrow. Persecutions or temptations are of themselves quite unable to disturb his confidence or to interfere with his joys. Even where positive sin has separated him from former consciousness of His grace, God still goes on loving him. However fickle and feeble our faith, we may yet abide in the love of God if we will. Nothing but our own stubborn wilfulness can ever dislodge us from this anchor-ground.

Which is, and which was, and which is to come.

THIS is the key to a right understanding of the vision of the enthroned Christ which John saw in Patmos. His present advocacy and energy on behalf of His people is entirely the outcome of His sacrificial and redemptive work for them. He lives to be their King only because once He died to be their Saviour. His Coming Again is to be the completion of the circle of grace, whereof Bethlehem, and Calvary, and His present session at the right hand of God, are but segments.

We need this full-orbed view of the Saviour in order rightly to apprehend His complete ministry on our behalf. For never without loss or detriment to ourselves can we over-emphasize one aspect of His work against another. The Christ of to-day, Who sits on the right hand of the Throne, is the historic Christ of the Gospels. The Christ of to-morrow, Who will come in the clouds of Heaven, is still the Christ of the scarred hand and the crown of thorns.

The full assurance of believers is not in anything whereunto we may attain, nor in that which we may by grace accomplish. It is in Him, and in Him alone. Hence we cannot be too much taken up with the great objective truth of His sufficiency. For all past, present, and future need is completely met in what He was, and is, and is yet to be. To His people nothing lies outside the scope of this wide comprehension. To them there is no history in which Christ does not hold the central place, no present experience in which Christ is not the avowed Lord, no future in which Christ is not the enthroned Conqueror.

I will give him the morning star.

WE live in a day which is not dying but dawning. The light which Christ has shed upon the world is in no sense waning but ever increasing toward brighter and wider dominion. For He Himself, the Sun of Righteousness, is also the Morning Star which heralds the fulness of day. He is the King of the ages which are gone, and the Key also of those which are yet to come. In Him the past had its inspiration; and in Him also the future is foretold and interpreted. The morning star is the brightest of all the constellations. It pales every other star, and always shines in vivid contrast to the darkest hour before the dawn which it ushers in. At one point in its orbit it comes nearer to the sun, and at another point it comes nearer to the earth, than any other planet. Hence the force of its analogy to the saving ministry of the Lord Christ, Who in Himself touches highest heaven and lowest earth, the Throne of God and the need of men; and Who combines in one bright beam of salvation the light of truth and righteousness, of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and glory.

Upon those who are in the darkness of sin, and the gloom of self-distrust and self-despair, He sheds the great light of possible fellowship with a reconciled Father. To those who are in the darkness of perplexity and uncertainty, He appears in the promise of fuller revelation and complete experience, assuring the constancy of omnipotent love. To all He is ever promising better things than they have known. But in its fullest meanings the ministry of "the Morning Star" is only known "to him that overcometh,"—to such as stand fast amid the temptation to sacrifice conscience for convenience, to forgo glory for gain, or to barter purity for mere pleasure. And His bright shining is but the foreglow of His yet brighter Appearing.

Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

THE truth of Christ's Coming is too often divorced from its practical implicates in the lives of His people. In the Word it is set forth, however, as the basis of all moral and spiritual exhortation, as the inspiration of all redemptive effort, and as the promotion of all unworldly living. All of which is implied and summarized in this His own warning as to the duty of holding fast, and the danger of losing the crown.

Let it be clearly understood that the crown has nothing to do with the matter of personal salvation, but is rather the individual vocation of each believer. For life's greatest value is its unique power of individual apprehension and attainment. This, then, is just Christ's warning as to the peril of losing grip upon privilege already realized, and of so forfeiting glory. It implies the certainty of temptation to relax effort, despite all the imperatives of the new life. But it proclaims also the possibility of victorious resistance.

To forfeit the crown is an irreparable loss. If a man does not carefully guard all that capacitates him for the service of God he will be superseded by another more faithful than himself. Just as Moses forfeited the crown of leadership to Joshua, as Saul forfeited the crown of government to David, as David forfeited the crown of service to Solomon, and as Judas forfeited the crown of apostleship to Matthias, so do unfaithful believers forfeit their highest glory by careless doubt, by languid watchlessness, or by faithless cowardice. For only he is fit to wear the crown who values it beyond life itself. And only he can "hold that fast" which by grace he has, whose hands are entirely disengaged from every other pursuit.

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.

THIS song of heavenly praise is likewise the inspiration of earthly practice. It is the full-voiced triumph-song of those who all along the pilgrim pathway have given to Christ that of which He alone is worthy. For Heaven is not a place but a state. The centre of its blessedness is the Lamb upon the Throne, to Whom all yield allegiance and offer praise. Just so is it in the blessed life of the present. To establish Him in faith and love upon the heart's highest throne is the secret of all heavenliness. When He occupies the same relative position in the lives of His people as He occupies in the Glory, the same consequences of His supremacy will, in measure, follow. Those who give to Him, by practical consecration, the glory and honour and praise of their redeemed lives, are thereby anticipating their share in His future triumph.

Who can exhaust the theme of Christ's worthiness to receive at the hands of His people the entire strength and good of their lives? For His is the worthiness of love which did not shrink from the utmost sacrifice in accomplishing redemption. Found worthy of the Father's Divine approval, He is for ever worthy of the utmost devotion of His people. And perhaps His greatest grace is seen in His acceptance of what they willingly yield. What a humbling joy it is to be assured that even such poor gifts as we lay at His feet are accepted and used! Nothing invests life with more serious worth than just this opportunity it affords of bringing to Him that which may add to His praise.

In the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne a book.

PART at least of the significance of the heavenly vision is that the sealed mysteries of life are held in the hand of the Lord. How often are we tempted to conclude that life is a haphazard affair, that its experiences are without any co-ordinating purpose, and that its issues are the sport of chance? Faith sometimes has its dark hours in which it is difficult to reconcile human experience with hitherto cherished Divine assurance. And the hour grows darker with its musings. Right does for ever seem to be on the scaffold, while wrong commonly seems to hold the throne. The watching eye sees nothing around but chaos and unrelieved gloom. But to be dominated by the outlook is to be worsted in the conflict.

How bright is the vision which gladdens faith's penetrative gaze upward. The volume of life's mysteries is held in the hand of Divine love. It is sealed with the seven-fold signet of Divine faithfulness. God Himself is the Author of the book; and hence its contents need never disturb the confidence of His people. The one Who alone can open and interpret its pages is He Who is both Lion and Lamb. For its eternal record is somehow identified with His work, and interpreted by His redemptive passion. The past has been an anticipation of the future. Things which are, form the foundation of things which shall be. Nothing is yet to be revealed but what grace has already planned. The book held in the hand of Omnipotence contains the record of an unchanged love. Hence the vision bids all our fears begone.

The wrath of the Lamb.

NOTHING is more startling in the portraiture of Christ which the New Testament affords than its ascription to Him of such a quality. The tenderer qualities of His character so forcefully appeal to us, and are of such winsome fascination, that we are almost unwilling to admit the possibility of anything like moral indignation in One so full of grace and truth. It is, however, just because He is full of grace and truth that He is capable of this quality, which is essential to all moral perfection. While nothing in the record of His earthly life approaches to vindictiveness or passionate anger, there are, nevertheless, glimpses of the sterner things which make it certain that Eternity will disclose His Divine capacity of judgment. The wrath then so surely to be visited upon those who have wilfully and finally rejected Him, must be all the sorer because it is seen in the One Who hitherto has exhibited the love of God in its Fatherliness, forgiveness, and faithfulness. The sound of "Depart from Me, ye cursed," will be the more awful because it is uttered by lips which hitherto have reiterated the eternal "Come" of the Gospel.

True love always holds the possibility of an anger which is yet without sin. It seeks not its own; and hence neither defends itself from wrong treatment nor resentfully exacts punishment of its offender. But the violation of its purposes, especially when this involves irreparable loss to the object of its devotion, inevitably kindles a pure flame of passionate indignation. This is pre-eminently so in Him Who is Love Incarnate. To reject finally His sacrificial gifts, to the everlasting undoing of his own soul, involves any man in the awesome prospect of His blazing righteousness.

White in the Blood of the Lamb.

IN every glimpse of the Heavenly glory which the vision in Patmos opens to us, striking pre-eminence is given to the sacrificial aspect of Christ's work. It is as "the Lamb slain" that He is seen upon the Throne. It is of His redeeming death that adoring hosts sing praise. It is by virtue of His precious Blood alone that those who offer ceaseless adoration and worship are there. The white raiment in which they are arrayed owes its freedom from stain to the efficacy of His dying, applied to each life by the Eternal Spirit. The Blood of the Lamb is the one right of His people to the Heavenly presence, as it has ever been their one assurance of true earthly peace. They are there, not because of attainment in character or achievement in service, but because of simple reliance upon the Life laid down for their salvation.

Seeing that this is so, what can be of such great importance as to seek personal certainty in regard to the only preparation for standing unashamed before the Judgment, to which each shall one day be summoned? For it is here and now that the cleansing must be wrought, if at all. It is here and now that the Blood of Christ is of avail to wash out the most shameful stains which defile the robes of the sons of men. It is here and now that, in virtue of His life and death, Christ has power to renew unto holiness those who have fallen furthest from the height of God's purpose. What blind folly it is that any of us should seek by our own endeavour to rid ourselves of "one dark blot."

Much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints.

IT would seem as though prayer has no inherent power of effective commendation to God. It must needs come up before Him perfumed with the incense of the perfect life and death of the Lord Jesus. When upon earth He taught that prayer, to be effective of its purpose, must be offered to the Father in His Name. Here the same lesson is taught in pictorial form. The imagery of censer and incense is of easy interpretation. For it surely tells that by His merit alone can any man have power with God to prevail in supplication and intercession. It is ever upon the Son of Man that the angels of God ascend with earth's requests, and descend with Heaven's blessing.

Our prayers are—speaking generally—the worthiest part of our lives. At prayer a man is most truly himself. His purest desires are expressed, and his loftiest aspirations find voice. But even these are not pure enough, nor lofty enough, in themselves. However vehement his desire, or resolute his aim, it is not on account of these that his prayer finds acceptance with God. The "much incense" must be constantly offered up with the prayers of "all saints" upon the golden altar which is before the Throne. It is upon Christ alone that the Father looks, and upon us as in Him. It is the strong appeal of the accepted Sacrifice which secures the certain answer and the sure supply of need. How confident may we be, then, as we approach the Throne, conscious though we are of our unworthiness. We deserve nothing. But may ask "anything" in the Name which is all-prevailing; and hence may make our petitions large and our requests deep. For the incense in the censer is not only "much"—but sufficient.

Neither repented they.

THIS is, perhaps, the most awe-inspiring record of the finally impenitent. Despite all their suffering of discipline and punishment no moral change is produced in them. It is as though they had lost all power to repent. The filthy man is filthy still. Character has set into its eternal mould. The course of the swift stream of life cannot be diverted at will. Destiny has been already determined by maintained moral attitude. The tree lies as it falls. And it falls because it has been rotted from within.

Of all warnings against trifling with sin, this is the most serious. For sin writes its record, not on some invisible volume kept in the Divine secret but upon the life and character of the one who engages in it. It simply destroys the moral fibre of a man's being. Deteriorated capacity, defiled imagination, degenerate tastes, and destroyed will, are its permanent and indelible marks. Thus it is that even in the stress of emotion, or under the pressure of discipline, men find themselves utterly unable to reverse the direction of life's moral currents. They become incapable of shuddering at suggestions which lose their terror, and of resisting overtures which once had startled them. Even when the consequence of sin comes home in measure to them, they are strangely unable to free themselves of its grip, so that it seems as though true repentance had become almost an actual impossibility. The great danger for every man in breaking the law of God, is that he himself becomes broken in the process.

Take it, and eat it up.

THE Word of God, for which the "little book" in some measure stands, is both sweet and bitter to the one who feeds upon it. It is always sweet to the taste, with a sweetness which never cloys. Indeed, unlike all other sweetness, it creates and increases appetite for itself; so that none are ever sated as they eat. But its bitterness is known also, as its claims conflict with the unrenewed tastes, the uncontrolled purposes, and the untamed energies of the yielded life. For it is, indeed, the Word which "works effectually in them that believe"; and hence its bitterness is a moral astringent. It strives unto victory against all that is unholy and untrue. It contradicts all that is unworthy. But its effect is tonic upon those who do not turn from its demands in petulant unwillingness.

It is this personal experience of the power of the Word which alone qualifies men for its proclamation. For, as in the vision the commission to "prophesy before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings," follows the command to eat, so in the lives of all His servants among us. Having proof in themselves of its Divine properties they are sent forth to declare it to every creature. It is the miracle of their own experience which attests their message. They can proclaim its promises and power unwaveringly, only because they have proved its efficacy indubitably. And though their prophecy involves them in opposition and difficulty—even to the point of suffering and death—this same sweet and strengthening Word is their inspiration and stay.

Where also our Lord was crucified.

THE world is for ever branded with its greatest shame. This is its eternal reputation, amid the countless worlds of God's creation,—that it put the Lord Jesus to death when He came revealing the Love of God. The one outstanding fact of its history which blazes forth when all those things of men's enterprise and achievement to which such weight is now attached are forgotten, is its folly in regard to the Son of God. His Blood is upon its hands. Its record is for ever marred by the tragedy in which He suffered Himself to be crucified. In letters of flame this sentence summarizes the whole essential record of the world. It is the place "where also our Lord was crucified."

The one enduring thing in the life of an individual, as of a world, is his treatment of Jesus Christ. Life itself effaces many things as it pursues its course. The chill waters of death submerge many more. Time obliterates distinctions which hitherto have been conspicuous. But neither life, nor death, nor yet that which follows death, can do other to the record of a man's treatment of Christ than set it forth in boldest relief. We shall be eternally revealed in the Great Day only as those who have accepted and followed, or, in the alternative, have rejected and crucified God's Son. The abiding reality which determines the eternal destiny of each of us is nothing less than our voluntary relationship with Him Whom God hath sent. As we crucify or crown Him we make certain the issue of the judgment.

They overcame Him.

THE history of the saints in every age is one of conflict. All who have ever followed in the train of the Lord Jesus have of necessity entered into His own experience in regard to temptation and opposition. The ever-vigilant adversary never fails to challenge and attack every spiritual position which is taken up by faith, with the intent of undermining the confidence of the believer in the covenant of his Lord. His method of attack is as varied as is the grace he seeks to destroy. Frontal and flank, secret and open, chronic and critical, his assaults are hurled at every true Christian. Hence it is that the Word of God abounds in exhortation to resistance, and in assurance of ultimate victory. The pathway in which Christ's servants follow Him is one of certain contest, but of equally certain conquest.

The record of those who have fought the fight, and now share the Heavenly glory, is set forth in these terms as an incentive and an encouragement to us. Not one of them had an easy pilgrimage. Not one was immune from the hostility and antagonism which we too experience. Not one of them found any failure in their resources of defence and attack! The Blood of the Lamb, the eternal sign of Satan's defeat and the victory of omnipotent love, was their all-sufficiency. It put the adversary to flight; for against all that the great Sacrifice means he can never stand. And herein for each of us, even the feeblest, lies the secret of being more than conqueror. The Life laid down, and now continuously imparted in response to faith, is our armour. It makes the weakest in His service both invulnerable and invincible.

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.

THE warnings of the Gospel of Christ are equally as impressive and arresting as its promises. It declares with a frankness which is, in part, the authentication of its Divine inspiration, the well-defined moral law that retribution is cast in the mould of the transgression of which it is the punishment. Equally referable to the Beast who personifies opposition to Christ and His Kingdom, and to individuals also who manifest the same spirit of rebellion against the authority of the Son of God, this law is at once a prophecy and a warning. Declared under imagery which only serves to intensify its reality and awfulness, the punishment of the finally impenitent, will, in its form at least, be determined largely by the character of the sin in which a man has declared his moral preferences. The greatest bitterness of all to the self-excluded man cannot fail to be the entire justice and appropriateness of the punishment meted out to him. To have our own sins, in all the magnitude of their eternal meaning, as our undying companions, is of all prospects the darkest and most hopeless.

Christ Himself gave more than a hint of the working of this law when He foretold the future of the man who is ashamed of Him in this generation: "Of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels." And again, in His declaration: "I will give unto every one of you according to your works." In the light of His Word, which cannot be broken, how careful is the watch we should keep upon our dispositions. For disposition breeds habits, habits build character, and character determines destiny.

The commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

IT is no artificial nor meaningless conjunction of unrelated things that unites the faith of Jesus, in which His people of every age have lived, with the commandments of God which they have kept, though each man of them began by breaking them. For it is only in the power of that life, of which faith in Christ is the communicating medium, that the law of God can be kept. Just as it is only in virtue of His atoning work, on which faith builds as upon solid rock, that the guilt of its breach in any life can be cleansed. Every Divine precept so far transcends human resource, that we are foredoomed to failure and condemnation as we endeavour to live in obedience, were it not for the imparted power which Christ makes a reality to His trustful followers.

It is just this fact, that in the mercy of God, Law and Life are so conjoined, which makes the pathway of holiness possible to us. For we all begin by breaking His commandments and creating thus a personal disqualification. To each of us the commandments stand for a reminder of sin and failure unspeakable. Their declaration is of unrelieved condemnation and of certain judgment. How bright is the light and how glad the tidings which " the faith of Jesus " brings to those who sit in the darkness and shadow of death ! For it proclaims pardon to the guilty, the possibility of a new beginning to the one who has failed, and the certainty of adequate power to the consciously feeble. It transforms every demand of God's Will into a covenanted promise of strength. It fills the believing heart with the gladness of a new courage. The saints sing indeed the song of Moses by whom the Law came. But only because it is keyed to the Song of the Lamb by Whom came grace and truth.

Just and true are Thy ways.

THE subject of Heaven's anthems is full of significance to those who are seeking so to follow in the footsteps of the Saviour as one day to realize its joys. For it is the experience of the redeemed which is the inspiration of their praise. Their song expresses their united apprehension of the Divine character, as known to them by His individual treatment of them. On their lips it is both an ascription of honour to Him and an Evangel to the world. Are there not many in every age who, in perplexity about some untoward happening, or in the half-light of an only partly-understood Providence, are prone to conclude that God's ways are not equal? Unable to reconcile His declarations with their own instincts and observations, they impugn His goodness or His power; and thereby cut themselves off from all that would help them to clearer seeing and wiser thinking. It is to all such that the message of this triumphant testimony is sent, as a contradiction of their impulsive judgments and an encouragement to patience.

Things which appear very dark and sinister now, will, when seen from the vantage-ground of a finished course, glow with the brightness of Divine love. God's justice is never questioned by those who will take time to acquire all the evidence. Hasty verdicts are, in the nature of things, certain to be erroneous and re-active. That man, however, becomes "wise unto salvation" who will wait for the final meanings of life's hard things, and who, meanwhile, will take God's justice and faithfulness as a working hypothesis. Ere long he will find himself almost unconsciously joining in this song of adoration.

REVELATION xvi. 15.

Behold, I come as a thief.

FROM first to last the New Testament declares the certainty of the Second Advent in a wealth of parable and imagery which is devoted to no other subject. Along with the certainty the suddenness and unexpectedness of Christ's Coming runs through the whole Book, giving coherence to all that is veiled and obscure. Like the refrain which makes itself heard through all the variations of time and tone in some fugue or sonata, so does this glad theme dominate the inspired volume and this Book of the Vision in particular. Obviously this closing warning is the last we are to have; and in the light of its assurance our duty is unmistakable.

A deep lethargy seems to settle upon God's people in regard to what should be their inspiring expectancy. The world is so near and so very real that it is easy to be taken up with its tasks and toys, its pursuits and pleasures, until their glamour pales the star of hope and their voices drown the message of warning. A false and unbelieving idea of permanence subtly pervades the minds of many of Christ's people, and, like a deadly miasma, it paralyses their energies. They do not really believe in the possible nearness of His Return. Hence they are not eagerly warning and laying hold of the unsaved, while yet opportunity for such service remains. And yet Christ has made it as plain as even He can, that with the quietness and swiftness of a thief who gives no warning of his approach, nor time for preparation, one day He will come. Supposing it were to-day! Are we ready to meet and to go with Him? Or should we be ashamed for Him to find us at the occupation which now gets most of our time, our thought, our strength?

Called, and chosen, and faithful.

THUS is expressed the ideal character of those who are with Christ in His last great warfare. They are "chosen" because they have responded to His call —not in any sense called because already chosen. Such an idea would rob the Gospel of its richest note— "Whosoever"; and would leave room for doubt in the minds of some as to the possibility of their own attainment. His call to fellowship is unfettered by any restriction of arbitrary favour.

Those who thus company with Him on the ground of His own free grace cannot but partake of His Spirit. And they increasingly acquire something of His likeness. There is that in the companionship of Christ which at once represses and develops personality. Its influence silently unmasks unfaithfulness wherever it lurks, and inspires confession and contrite renunciation. At the same time, it quickens keen desire and strenuous purpose to become like the Ideal. In Him alone we see what utter fidelity, which takes no count of the cost, really is; and only by being with Him in the sanctities of secret fellowship can we ever become like Him in the discharge of open allegiance.

Faithfulness is the one comprehensive qualification for engagement in the warfare of the Kingdom. Christ needs men now, and in the future, upon whom He may count; men whose dependableness enables Him to put them either in the obscure or the high places of the field, with the certainty that they will be faithful unto death if necessary. It is ever the faithful servant who enters into the joy of His Lord.

Come out of her, My people.

THIS last call to come out from that for which Babylon stands, gathers up all that the Word of God teaches concerning the necessity of separation from the world on the part of His people. From the earliest days He enjoined that a difference should be put between the clean and the unclean. Every Levitical ordinance proclaims that God's people are to be separated unto Himself. Every prophetic utterance, whether of condemnation or exhortation, is based upon this same assumption. And when, in the fulness of time, Christ came, it was in Himself to incarnate the principle of a life lived under the supreme government of God, completely given up to the doing of His Will, and finding its highest delight in accomplishing His service. All that He taught is re-echoed by His earliest witnesses; so that it is impossible to read the New Testament, apart from preconception or prejudice, without recognizing the fact that God's people are "not of the world." They are here to proclaim and exemplify His Gospel, and thus to shine in the world as the light of life. But they are delivered from its power and from all love of its enslaving pursuits. They are the citizens of a better country—that is, a Heavenly.

How far short of this Divine ideal do many of His people come to-day! The Church and the world are often so mixed up that it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Love of pleasure, vanity, and riches, which frankly characterize the world's life, have largely come to occupy the lives of God's people. And with this worldliness of spirit and aim has come a corresponding decrease of spiritual power. "Come out of her, My people," is God's loud call to all such. Anything less than entire separation from the world disqualifies for all saving work among its lost peoples.

Amen; Alleluia.

THESE words are far more than a mere fragment of the antiphon of Heavenly praise. For while they certainly form part of the triumphant song of those who adore the Lamb they also declare the secret of their lives. The saying of "Amen" may be, and often is, merely perfunctory and without meaning—the conventional ending to conventional worship. Its spiritual significance, however, is that it expresses submission to the revealed Will of God. "Let it be so," the surrendered heart responds to every apprehended Divine purpose; and forthwith sets itself to glad co-operation. "Let it be so," the yielded soul says, as it makes petition in the Name of Jesus; always persuaded that His interpretation of the prayer is wiser and larger than its own. Then, out of the spirit of this confident "Amen," the glad "Alleluia" is born. The heart at rest in God cannot but declare His glory. Praise is the spontaneous voice of satisfied faith.

In many a Christian life there is no "Alleluia" just because there is no "Amen." Where any controversy with God exists, where any unbelief in His purpose and power lurks, where any unwillingness to follow Him wholly is maintained, or where any resentment at His dealings is cherished, there the voice of glad adoration is silenced. The joylessness of such lives is a positive contradiction of the Evangel. It too often deters those, who are watching its witness, from themselves avowing the faith of Christ. On the other hand, life obviously lived in the spirit of "Amen! Alleluia!" cannot fail to be convincing of the reality of a Saviour, Who, while exercising control, at the same time inspires unspeakable joy. This is the echoed music of the Gospel which leads men Home.

And another book was opened.

IT would not be a true revelation of the nature of God which represented His last word—even in regard to the august experiences of the Day of Judgment—as that of wrath. Hence this bright ray which Divine love sheds upon the dark prospect of the Assize. Each man's life, with its uncounted sins of commission and omission, is as a volume which in that Day shall be opened to the scrutiny of the Lord. And for each the prospect is dark indeed; for who is not conscious that his book contains a story of shame and shortcoming which nothing can excuse, or alter, or efface? The secret of every life is its own conscious condemnation. Men may now successfully strive themselves to forget it, or to hide it from others. But the judgment of that day will bring it to remembrance, and declare it unerringly.

If there were no other books than these self-written ones to be opened, the outlook would be one of unrelieved darkness. There is another, however, containing the indelible record of those who, having no righteousness of their own, have put their trust in the spotless righteousness of Christ; who, conscious of their own defilement, have relied wholly upon the merits and cleansing power of His precious Blood; who, realizing the weakness of their own nature, have united themselves by faith to Him, and have lived in the power of His quickening and sanctifying Spirit. This is the Lamb's Book of Life. When opened, it for ever silences every voice of condemnation which the other books justify. For over and against the worst that the history of any man can show God sets the undying merit of His dear Son.

The Lamb is the light thereof.

OF all that is unveiled of the dazzling splendours of Heaven nothing is more alluring or satisfying than this declaration regarding the full zenith of Christ's influence. It is the blessed prospect of the redeemed that they shall for ever dwell in the City which hath no need of candle neither light of the sun. The whole glory of Heaven is the presence of the Lord Jesus. His brightness for ever pales every other light, and illumines and interprets both Heavenly glory and hitherto hidden mystery. By its dawning every good thing which God hath prepared is made known; and all for which His people have long waited, in patient hope of full explanation, is disclosed. Dimly they have seen His glory hitherto. Henceforth their every instinct is satisfied, and they know even as they are known.

In anticipation also, this is the source of every satisfaction in the Christian life of the present. Where Christ is enthroned as Lord, and His light welcomed as pointing out the true path of life amid all the perplexing and intersecting ways which tempt men to stray, the secret of blessedness is discovered. For that life becomes itself radiant with the reflected light of His own life. Its influence, like His, is shed upon the world with saving power. Those lives are alone able to bless others which themselves own no authority higher than Christ's; obey no light other than His; and seek no glory beyond that which comes to Him and His people in common. There is, indeed, no higher ideal, either of Heavenly glory or of earthly discipleship, than that of a life in which "the Lamb is the light thereof."

The First and the Last.

THERE is a profound meaning in this closing self-declaration of Christ as to being the "Last." It is relatively easy to understand Him as the "First," and to recognize that in Him light had its birth and life its beginning. Equally important, however, is the recognition of Him as God's complete declaration to the world. For in His life and teaching He fully and finally reveals God in saving contact with human conditions. His passive judgments and active sympathies are all unchangeably made known, so that He can truly say: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." In short, Christ is the last word of and concerning God.

In the same way, He is the last word regarding man also. For in Him is presented the perfect standard and pattern of human character. It may be true that every age surpasses its predecessor in ideals of duty and moral value. Yet in every age, and most of all in this, Christ towers triumphantly over the highest human attainment; so that, even by those who reject His claims as the Son of God, the flawless excellency and the supremacy of His character are admitted and admired. Never has there been such a man as the Man, Christ Jesus. And never again shall there be.

Further, as we look forward to all that lies beyond this life, Christ is seen to be the centre of the last great experiences of judgment which await the soul. For He is at once the Judge and the criterion of all judgment, which has been committed to Him "because He is the Son of Man." How assuring it is to know that He Who on the Throne is the "Last," is still the One Who was the "First,"—from Whom we learned the love of God in its saving fulness! The Throne of Glory can have no terrors for those who have come to know Him at the Throne of Grace.

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